

better luck next time

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Rating:	Explicit
Archive Warning:	Graphic Depictions Of Violence , Major Character Death
Category:	Gen
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Relationship:	Aizawa Shouta Eraserhead & Midoriya Izuku , Midoriya Inko & Midoriya Izuku , Midoriya Izuku & Todoroki Shouto , Midoriya Izuku & Monoma Neito , Bakugou Katsuki & Midoriya Izuku
Character:	Midoriya Izuku , Bakugou Katsuki , Midoriya Inko , Yagi Toshinori All Might , Aizawa Shouta Eraserhead , Original Characters , Tsukauchi Naomasa , Uraraka Ochako , Iida Tenya , Kirishima Eijirou , Kaminari Denki , Yaoyorozu Momo , Asui Tsuyu , Tokoyami Fumikage , Jirou Kyouka , Mineta Minoru , Hagakure Tooru , Todoroki Shouto , Ojiro Mashirao , Thirteen (My Hero Academia) , Shigaraki Tomura Shimura Tenko , Kurogiri (My Hero Academia) , Shinsou Hitoshi , Yamada Hizashi Present Mic , Monoma Neito , Toogata Mirio , Usagiyama Rumi Miruko , Mouse (better luck next time) , Miura Sumire (Better Luck Next Time) , Furuya Kazuo (Better Luck Next Time) , Furuya Manami (Better Luck Next Time) , Sasaki Maiko (Better Luck Next Time) , Yamauchi Ren (Better Luck Next Time) , Kojima Ema (Better Luck Next Time) , Kojima Haruta (Better Luck Next Time) , Ishida Maka (Better Luck Next Time)
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Series:	Part 1 of blnt 'verse
Collections:	Vigilante Izuku because why the hell not , Best of Hurt/Comfort , Dad Vibes , Loaf's Grains , Little Red's BNHA Library , better luck next time and related works , Creative Chaos Discord Recs , BNHA BEST CHAPTER FICS TO EVER GRACE THE INTERNET , BNHA Canon Rewrites/Rehashes- with a twist! , Amazing Reads and Inspiration for BNHA , gh0st's favorites , bnha fics that kill me..resurrect me...only to kill me again , Bnha fics that carved out a place in my brain , Quality Fics , Read it and weep , Faves and must-reads , It swallows me in , fanfics i ranted to my mom about but didn't have the heart to tell her they were fanfics , Sturgeon's Fuck You , BNHA Treasure Box , SakurAlpha's Fic Rec of Pure how did you create this you amazing bean , I suffer from this condition called having good taste , favorite fics ever , death need not apply , best fics ive read on ao3 nghh , Izuku and his Collection of Dads , definite keepers , Fics That I Like , The best of mha on ao3 , Masterful Works of (Fan) Fiction , trauma go brrr , long bnha fics i'll always come back to , Scratch's pile of fanfics that they recommend to every stranger like the gospel , crispyminiz favs , Elite 50k+ My Hero

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Stats:

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better luck next time

by [nauticalwarrior](#)

Summary

As he falls, he lets himself think about it. He lets himself think that if he wakes up, if things go back again, it means that he does have a quirk. It means he really can take a swan dive off a roof and hope for better luck in his next life. It means that all along, he's been useless and worthless because he hasn't died yet.

He hits the ground.

And then he opens his eyes.

(vigilante!izuku AU where izuku has a quirk that rewinds time when he dies)
(updates every other day most of the time!)

Notes

hi!! im really excited to publish this! i actually wrote all of this chapter and another chapter in one day, so there should be an update soon. im going to update tags and warnings as things go along, but PLEASE keep in mind that this fic will contain multiple graphic descriptions of suicide. even though izuku doesn't die permanently, he definitely still kills

himself.

chapter-specific content warnings will be in end notes for each chapter! i will not be warning for suicide or canon typical violence in the end notes, even if it occurs in that chapter.

this fic was inspired by a lot of things, especially viridian: green guide, and re:zero! i hope you enjoy!

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(note, added 3/17/2021: please be respectful in reading and commenting on this fic. do not read this fic if suicide, self harm, or violence are triggering to you. i have made it ABUNDANTLY clear that this fic contains those topics. if you read and get triggered, that's on you.

please don't leave comments saying that im triggering you, that graphically describe your trauma, or that are saying you plan on killing yourself. im not a therapist. im not a helpline. if this fic makes you suicidal, upset, or angry then... stop reading it.)

(edit 12/11/2021: thank you for reading and for the continued support on this fic! if you're a new reader, just a heads up that certain parts of this fic are EXTREMELY graphic as far as torture and gore go. i was in a Bad Place when i wrote them and uh. yeah they're hard to read even for me lol. just be warned!!)

beginnings

Kacchan's hand on his shoulder is smoldering hot, popping and crackling with little explosions that burn even through his middle school uniform. Izuku leans back, but Kacchan leans forward, his breath minty and his eyes narrowed in anger, his grip tightening painfully on Izuku's shoulder.

"In other words, don't you *dare* get into UA, nerd!" Kacchan growls, his words punctuated by a series of pops from his hand, and Izuku can't stop himself from breaking eye contact, his whole body shaking with stupid, stupid fear. He's still frozen there, in the almost empty classroom, while Kacchan and his friends start to stalk out of the room, their shoes clicking on the linoleum tiles.

"Oh, and Deku?" Kacchan says. "You want to be a hero? I've got an idea for you." His voice is mocking, light. Izuku doesn't turn to look at him.

"Take a swan dive from the roof and pray you get a quirk in the next life!" He sneers, and *that* makes Izuku turn, makes his head whips around, eyes hot with tears. He tries to say something, anything, but something hot and ugly is bubbling up in his chest and he can't say anything at all.

Kacchan narrows his eyes, raises a hand and lets off a small explosion. "Yeah, what?" He says, crackling smoke and light in his hand, before he turns and follows his buddies out of the classroom. Izuku can hear them whooping and laughing in the hallway. He thinks he hears someone tell Kacchan that that was *funny*.

Funny. Izuku bites his lip, clenches and unclenches his fists. *Idiot. If I jump, you'll be blamed for bullying me into suicide*, he thinks. *If I jump.*

Izuku walks slowly through the empty halls of Aldera Junior High. His shoulder hurts where Kacchan burned it. His head hurts from his clogged sinuses, his nose and throat irritated from holding back tears. He walks out the front doors, turns to the little pond under the window, with the koi fish nipping at the edges of his precious notebook.

"That's not fish food," he mutters, his eyes filling with tears anew. He feels like he's going to be sick as he pulls his 13th analysis notebook out of the water, the ash sliding off and the water smearing the ink on the page. He tries to dry it off some with the edge of his sleeve, but the shiny fabric doesn't want to absorb the water. It smells like a camping trip, like old burnt-out flames and the green, swampy smell of a river or a lake. Izuku clutches the notebook to his chest, lets himself sob quietly as he walks away from the school.

The familiar sights are blurring together, probably since he's upset. Maybe that's why he misses the villain, doesn't see it coming. He certainly feels it though, green slime wrapping itself around his throat in a chokingly tight hold. The sludge grips him, and the villain laughs.

"Just calm down," he sneers, "It'll only hurt for about 45 seconds, and it'll all be over." His voice reminds Izuku of Kacchan, for the briefest moment. He starts to fight back, then relaxes. The villain is fluid. He wouldn't be able to do anything anyway.

He lets himself go limp, lets the villain force its way down his throat. It feels like choking, like swallowing something down the wrong pipe but *worse*, like his lungs are going to split open. The villain smells vaguely like the koi pond, sludgy and swampy and green. Izuku's vision is starting to go black when he wonders which hero is on duty today. Would they find him in time?

He finds it hard to care as his vision cuts out completely, the sensation of choking replaced with a

dull pain in his chest. *It's not a swan dive off a roof, Kacchan, but maybe I'll get a quirk in the next life anyway,* he thinks as his consciousness slips away.

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Izuku opens his eyes, gasps for air. He reaches for his throat desperately, feeling nothing but clean skin. He's not outside in that tunnel, not surrounded by the fading afternoon light and green slime. He's in the classroom, and Kacchan has a hand on his shoulder. Izuku coughs, rubbing at his throat.

"What the fuck is wrong with you?" Kacchan asks, then shoves him aside. "Whatever. I don't want to catch whatever he has." He says, taking a step away from Izuku and sulking after his friends. Izuku watches his back move, watches him pause in the doorway and turn his head back, a sneer on his lips.

"I meant it about UA, *Deku*. If you show up there, I'll kill you myself." Kacchan spits, the fluid landing on the floor in front of him. Izuku keeps a hand on his throat, panting as Kacchan shrugs and leaves the classroom, slamming the door behind him hard enough to rattle the desks closest to it. Izuku stares.

I died. He blinks, looks down at his hands. They don't look any different. He doesn't feel any different. His chest doesn't hurt, doesn't burn. His uniform is clean and dry. His notebook is gone, probably in the koi pond where he'd found it before. *Unless that was a daydream?*

Izuku's never been the daydreaming type before, not like that anyway. He shoves his shaking hands in his pockets and listens for the sounds of conversation, but Kacchan and his buddies seem to have already left. He sighs in relief, then makes his way over to the door and opens it. He walks down the hallway, just like before. Walks to the koi pond. His notebook is there, floating as the fish investigate.

"No," he whispers, pulling it out and shaking it off, not bothering to wipe it off this time. "Not for you guys." The fish don't reply, but they do swim away from where the notebook was, drifting idly in the little pond. Izuku stares at his reflection in the water, stained grey from the concrete below. He looks tired. Scared. Nothing abnormal.

He doesn't know what just happened. He tucks his notebook under one arm and starts walking away from the school, taking a different route than before. Did he really die? The afternoon looks the same as before, warm golden light spilling across the ground from the sun, shadows angled and low. He walks along a brick wall for a bit, his shoes scraping on the concrete sidewalk, before he pauses. Is he under the effects of someone's quirk?

He takes a breath, pauses. He doesn't have a dry notebook to write in right now, but he can think like he would when he's writing. What does he know?

He knows he left school already once today. He knows he was attacked by a villain in the tunnel on the way home. He knows he didn't fight back, and as a result, he died. He knows he didn't *actually* die. He knows Kacchan reacted to him acting strangely. What doesn't he know?

He doesn't know if any of this is actually what happened. He doesn't know if he's under the effects of a quirk, or if he is, whose quirk that would be. He doesn't know if fighting back against the villain would make any difference.

Izuku does know one thing. If he wants to know if that was real, if that villain was actually there at the end of the tunnel, he's only got one way to find out. He turns on his heels and walks in the

direction of the tunnel. His survival instincts scream at him not to; he's already died once! But Izuku doesn't want to leave this unsolved. After all, he'd already "died" once, if this is actually happening. Some small part of him doesn't mind. He wonders if he'd be missed, but then he shakes his head. Of course, his mom would be devastated. He marches onward, turning on a familiar side street. He'll approach from the end of the tunnel the villain had been waiting in last time. Or at least he thinks. He wishes he'd been paying more attention last time, but...

He remembers Kacchan's words. (If he actually said them. Who's to say this isn't all Izuku's overactive imagination?). He remembers being told to *take a swan dive off the roof*. He remembers the sneer on Kacchan's face, the amusement of his friends. Izuku hopes that wasn't real, but something ugly in him twists and whispers that *Kacchan would say that to someone like you*.

He sees the tunnel entrance, and it looks a little odd to be facing this direction in the afternoon. Normally when he goes through it from this side, it's morning, with the sun behind him and not crowning the top of the bridge above in an orange-yellow halo. He squints against the light. Hopefully, the villain didn't leave in the time it took Izuku to make this decision. He's not sure what he'd do if he couldn't confirm or deny that he'd died and, well. Come back? He's not sure what to call it, to be honest.

Izuku sees the villain before it sees him this time. It's a mass of sludge already, meaning it likely didn't have a human form except for those eyes and that mouth. He gasps a little when he sees it slide out of the tunnel, and he covers his mouth too late, the villain's eyes swivelling to focus on him. The villain's mouth contorts into a wide, ugly grin, and Izuku hears a familiar voice.

"Perfect! A medium sized body to hide in..." The villain rushes forward at him at that point, and even though Izuku braces himself, the impact still hurts. He covers his mouth and nose with his hands, writhing as the sludge wraps around him, squeezing. It's oddly dry for a sludge quirk, not sticking to his clothes so much as enveloping him. Izuku takes a deep breath of air before the sludge wraps around his hands where they guard his mouth and nose, and his hands ache from strain as the sludge tries to push itself between his fingers.

"Smart fucking kid," the villain growls. "Stop resisting. It's only gonna hurt more if you make me wait," he says, and Izuku thrashes harder at that, remembering the horrible choking sensation. Holding his breath like this is better, so much better.

Even so, he can feel his limbs starting to grow weak. He can't pull his head out of the grip, even when he tosses his head back hard enough to make his neck ache. He thinks, hysterically, that he's going to die again. He can feel his eyes fill with painful tears, his chest burning from the lack of oxygen. His head starts to fill with fuzziness, and he realizes that the villain was right. It did hurt more to resist.

Just as Izuku feels his limbs go limp, he hears a familiar voice. "Fear not, kid! For I am here!" All Might's voice rings out, and the hero punches the sludge villain hard enough that Izuku can feel the force as the villain is knocked off of him. He keeps his hands over his mouth and nose, gasping desperately for breath. He watches two tears hit the sidewalk below, turning it dark in two little circles, before he hits the ground. He tries to get up, but he's shaking too hard, dizzy and weak. He recognizes that he's lying on his side, limp, but he's not totally unconscious. Is he going to die anyway?

"Hey, hey," All might says, voice quieter, and he taps on the side of Izuku's face. "Hey, kid!" He says, a little louder, and it seems to be enough to wake Izuku's body up, and he opens his eyes the rest of the way.

“Oh, thank goodness!” All Might says with a grin, standing up. Izuku pushes himself up onto his elbows, staring up at the hero. “You’re okay! Excellent!”

“Wha--”

“I’m sorry for getting you caught up in my villain hunt!” All Might cuts him off, putting both hands on his hips. “But my success here is all due to you!” He says, grinning and holding up a bottle of familiar green sludge. “I’ve contained the villain!”

Izuku blinks, then feels his face split in a grin as he hops to his feet. “Wow! O-Oh,” he reaches for the half-destroyed notebook where it fell on the ground. “C-Can I-I get...?” he trails off, staring at the autograph already on the notebook.

“Thank you!!” He shouts, bowing to All Might. He straightens up to see the hero walking away from him.

“Now, I must get this to the authorities,” All Might says, not even looking back at Izuku. He crouches down in what Izuku knows is his stance when he’s preparing for a jump, and Izuku’s legs move without him telling them too. He sprints at All Might, wrapping his arms around the hero’s leg just in time as the hero shoots through the air. Izuku has to close his eyes against the rush of wind.

“H-Hey!” He hears All Might’s voice, muffled by the wind. “I appreciate the enthusiasm, but this is too much!” He kicks his leg a little. “Get down!”

“I-If I let go now, I-I’ll die!” Izuku shouts as a reply, his voice warped from the way the wind makes his lips and cheeks flap around.

“Right,” All Might says, and Izuku sees him grimace. “Well hold on, and shut your eyes and mouth!”

Izuku complies, and he abruptly realizes that he’s *holding on to All Might’s leg!* He feels a rush of adrenaline push through him as they land on what looks like a rooftop. He opens his eyes and releases All Might, looking up to see his idol leaning on the railing of the roof, facing away from him.

“U-Um, I h-have something I n-need to ask you....” Izuku says, and All Might glances back at him.

“I don’t have time!” All Might says, crouching slightly, like he’s going to jump again.

“Can s-someone-- Can someone become a h-hero, even without a quirk?” Iziuku gasps it out, taking a step towards his hero and squeezing his eyes shut, not willing to see the look on All Might’s face. He just-- he needs to hear this. He needs someone to tell him he can be a hero.

He starts to mutter about why he wants to be a hero, about All Might, saving people with a smile. He opens his eyes, and All Might is gone.

“A-An imposter?!” He shouts, taking a step back. “You’re an imposter?!” He asks the skeletal form, and its dark eyes track to his face, grimacing at him.

“No,” he replies, and Izuku takes another step back. “I am All Might.”

“Y-You’re all shriveled up...” he replies, his voice barely a mumble, and he sees blood at All Might’s mouth.

"You know how guys at the pool are always sucking in and flexing and try to hold their buff? I'm like that." All Might says, and Izuku gapes.

"No way..." he replies, staring at the skeletal person in front of him. He *does* resemble All Might, but in the same way that chopsticks resemble telephone poles.

"I'm counting on you to keep your mouth shut. Don't go talking about this online or telling your friends," All Might says, and he turns his head away from Izuku and lifts his shirt up with one hand.

The scar he reveals is horrible, like he was grabbed at the chest and *twisted*. It's red and angry, with the veins visible under the thin skin, but the worst part is how sunken in it is. Izuku covers his mouth with a hand to stop himself from gasping at it, and All Might lets his shirt flutter back down with a sigh.

"Pretty gross, right? I got this from a big fight five years back. My respiratory system was basically destroyed. I lost my whole stomach. All the surgeries have pretty much worn me out and it can't be fixed. Right now, I can only do hero work for about 3 hours a day. The rest of the time, this is what I look like." He turns away from Izuku again.

"Five years ago?" Izuku mumbles. "D-Does that mean the fight with Toxic Chainsaw...?"

All Might glances back at him and chuckles. "No, no. You know your stuff, but Toxic Chainsaw isn't strong enough to do something like this. The fight with... with this person, it was never publicized. I did everything I could to keep it under wraps. I'm supposed to be the guy who always smiles, right? I'm the symbol of peace, people everywhere have to think that I'm never afraid. But honestly, I smile to hide the fear inside." He cracks a painful-looking smile. "It's just a brave face I put on when the pressure is high. This job isn't easy."

He frowns. "Pro heroes are always having to risk their lives. Some villains just can't be beaten without powers. So no, I honestly don't think you can be a hero without a quirk." He meets Izuku's eyes, and Izuku tries not to cry. He feels the tears rising, biting at his eyes, but thankfully All Might turns away from him.

"If you want to help people, there's plenty of other ways to do it. You can become a police officer. They get crap because the heroes capture most of the villains, but it's a fine profession. It's not bad to have a dream young man, just... make sure your dreams are obtainable, realistic, understand?" All Might rambles on, coughing a bit when he finishes, but Izuku can't process the words. He can't be a hero. If All Might said it, it must be true, right? He can't be a hero.

An explosion rings out from behind him, probably a few blocks away, but still loud enough to make him gasp. All Might turns, grits his teeth.

"I have to go check that out," he says, not even *looking* at Izuku. "You knock on the door and I'm sure the people downstairs will let you in if it's locked." He doesn't make eye contact, just puffs back into his muscle form and coughs before jumping away. Izuku just stares.

Izuku wonders, briefly, if he could have said something different. If he'd worded it differently. Maybe if he'd taken down the villain himself, instead of waiting. He wonders if he'd get a second chance, if he died. He looks around. The building is taller than the others around, and all of the other roofs are empty. All Might probably landed here *because* it was tall.

The only thing stopping him is a chain link fence around the perimeter of the roof. Izuku walks up to it, climbs it. The metal digs into the flesh of his hands, and he pauses at the top. What if he

doesn't wake up, like last time? What if he doesn't *die* ?

He looks down, and his head swims sickeningly at the distance. Oh, he'll die. He doesn't stop to let himself have more time to think about this. He scrambles over the edge of the chain link fence and steps onto the thin ledge between him and the (ten-story? More? He can't tell.) fall. He takes a deep breath and jumps.

As he falls, he lets himself think about it. He lets himself think that if he wakes up, if things go back again, it means that he *does* have a quirk. It means he really can take a swan dive off a roof and hope for better luck in his next life. It means that all along, he's been useless and worthless because he *hasn't died yet* .

He hits the ground.

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Izuku opens his eyes, expecting Kacchan's hand on his shoulder and the fluorescent lights of his classroom, but instead the wind blowing across the roof whips against his face. He's staring at the chainlink fence, from where he was standing when All Might jumped away. He sees the clouds drifting across the sky, high above the buildings, tinted orange with the setting sun. He blinks.

He has a quirk. The thought is foreign to him, and he doesn't know what to think other than *he has a quirk* ! It didn't make sense, really. He'd been diagnosed quirkless at age five based on the fact that despite him lacking the extra toe joint, a battery of tests hadn't revealed *any* evidence of a quirk. He was told that this just happens, sometimes. It's caused by two quirks canceling each other out completely, or by having a latent quirk so weak it was undetectable. Sometimes, too, genetics regress. A quirked family might have a child that lacks the genes for a quirk but kept the evolved toes. He should pick a different dream. Nobody's quirks had ever manifested past the age of six, anyway.

He'd held out until his sixth birthday before he had let himself believe it, and here he was, 14 and learning of his quirk for the first time.

Izuku couldn't die. He sits down on the concrete rooftop, breathes. If he does, he's taken back to shortly before the event. He's not sure how far back it will go, though. Does it depend on what killed him?

He starts to take out his notebook to write in it when the sound of another explosion catches his attention. He looks in the direction it came from just in time to see another one, bright and flashy. It looks kind of familiar.

Before he knows what he's doing, he's rushing in the direction of the blasts. He doesn't think he wants to analyze the heroes working the rescue, not after what just happened anyway. It wouldn't feel right. But he still finds himself running along the streets, towards the sounds of a struggle. He feels his heart beating fast in his chest as he rounds the corner to see that same sludge villain. He gasps.

He recognizes it, and he stands on his tiptoes to see over the crowd. There's a shock of blonde hair in the villain's grasp, and Izuku feels dread gather in the pit of his stomach. Did he make All Might drop the bottle when he grabbed onto him? If so, this would be his fault.

He sees the boy in the villain's grasp twist, grabbing a breath of air just as another volley of explosions go off. Izuku finds his breath taken away when he recognizes Kacchan, his face red from exertion and damp from sweat. Why weren't the heroes stepping in?

Izuku glances around desperately, only to see a hero working to put out the fires and another gathering civilians, but none of them helping Kacchan. He doesn't even think; his legs carry him on his own as he pushes through the crowd and runs at the villain.

He doesn't know what to do, though, and when he gets to the villain, it's ready for him. It slams a mass of thick sludge into his face, knocking him into the asphalt. A burst of red hot pain erupts on the side of his head, and woozily, he pulls himself up. The villain is right in front of him, Kacchan's struggles making the sludge writhe and bubble. The villain lurches towards him, and a flash of an explosion is the last thing he sees.

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When Izuku blinks his eyes open, he's back on top of the roof. He swears he can still feel the heat of the explosions, but this time he doesn't hesitate to run down the stairs, through the streets. He rushes at the villain again, this time from the side, but Kacchan's quirk kills him before he can even get close.

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On the third try, he takes a second to blink the sunspots out of his eyes before he moves. The roof is as quiet and windy as ever, and Izuku can hear the sounds of Kacchan's quirk, like before, but he doesn't rush. He sits down and opens his notebook, flipping through the pages.

He's delighted to see that it's all still legible, at least for him reading his own handwriting, anyway. He flips through the pages, looking for anything he'd written down about villains similar to this one. His heart thumps in his chest, and he wants nothing more than to get down there, to save Kacchan, but he doesn't. He doesn't get up, even though he remembers how it felt to have the villain choking you while you fought back, remembers the desperate plea in Kacchan's eyes. He doesn't move, because he knows from personal experience that he will *die* if he doesn't go in with a game plan. If he takes too long, well, he'll just kill himself and rewind.

Izuku finds a page in his journal, just a half filled one, but it's what he needs. It's over an intern, a hero-in-training who can turn herself into water, all except for her head. It's a good power, but he's written down the weaknesses, including the fact that her head clearly being solid gives it away as her weak point. Seeing it, written so plainly, Izuku feels dumb. He gathers up his bag and his notebook and runs to the scene, hoping he'll get there in time and won't have to die to make this work.

The scene isn't any different from last time, except there's more fire and the crowd watching has grown bigger. Izuku feels a swell of anger at that as he pushes through the crowd. The heroes are *right here*, and they haven't done anything. They're watching Kacchan choke and die, and they aren't moving because they aren't a *good match*. Izuku bites his lip to stop himself from making a face. He forces his way through the barrier, ignoring shouts behind him, and lobs his backpack at the villain's eyes.

He sees it hit out of the corner of his eye as he whips around to glare directly at Kamui Woods. "The eyes," he pants, pointing at the sludge villain and praying Kamui listens to him and moves before the villain recovers. "Hit it in the eyes."

Kamui's eyes widen slightly and he nods, whipping out two wooden branches to smack the villain in its eyes, right as it opens the one Izuku's backpack had hit. The pain seems to be enough, and Kacchan struggles free, dropping onto the ground gasping for air. The ground around him crackles with the force of the explosion he lets off, and then he's on his feet, stumbling towards the police officers that are grabbing onto Izuku and pulling him back.

Kacchan makes eye contact with him as the other heroes jump into the fray, apparently spurred on by Kamui fighting the villain. Without Kacchan setting off new explosions, it looks like the fire isn't a big issue for them. Izuku stares as Kamui wraps a wooden tendril around the sludge villain's mouth like a gag.

"Hey, kid," the officer next to him says, nudging him. "You alright? You really shouldn't cross police barriers."

Izuku looks up and nods. "I'm okay. Sorry."

The officer shrugs. "You had a smart idea." He looks back over at the fight, and Izuku slips behind him, pushing back into the crowd. A couple of people say something to him, but he ignores it, walking away from the scene. He'll get his backpack later, when the fires have gone out. His notebook is plenty burned already. For right now, all he wants to do is sleep.

A hand on his shoulder stops him, and he turns to see the skeleton form of All Might.

"Kid," All Might says. "You've got a good head on your shoulders." He sighs. "I know I was harsh earlier, but... you'd make a really good detective. Don't let your dream get in the way of your potential." He smiles at Izuku, but it looks creepy in this form.

Izuku smiles back, but it doesn't reach his eyes. "It's okay. Thank you, All Might," he says, then brushes the hand off of his shoulder and walks away.

He doesn't need All Might's approval, not anymore. He isn't quirkless. He *has* a quirk, and he isn't going to let it go to waste.

a boy in cosplay

Chapter Notes

hahah i haven't been writing all day instead of doing literally anything productive what do you mean

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

School seems so stupid, now that it's so close to the end of the year. Izuku knows he should be paying attention to his teachers, but it's hard when he knows that he has a *quirk*!

He hasn't told anyone, though. He stares out the window of the classroom, picking at the edge of his notebook. Kacchan's mom had brought it over after the incident, saying she'd heard from Kamui that he had the idea to aim for the eyes. She told him to be careful, that Kacchan was recovering fine. Izuku's written in it nearly nonstop since, filling it with theories about his own quirk, but keeping the writing in third person. He flips to the most recent page, stares at the sloppy handwriting, the smudges of pencil lead from being opened and shut too many times.

It's not like he *shouldn't* tell anyone, he thinks. His mom would be horrified, that's for sure, but she'd still be happy for him. The issue is he doesn't think anybody *but* his mom would believe him. It's only rational. If he, a fourteen year old professional diagnosed as quirkless, suddenly started claiming to have a quirk that he couldn't *prove* existed, he'd get brushed off as lying to make things better for himself. He doesn't want the bullying to get worse, not even as much as some small part of him wants to tell the bullies and then *kill himself in front of them to see their reactions*. God, what is wrong with him?

The thing is, now that he knows it isn't permanent (and that he's done it before), suicide doesn't sound so terrifying. It doesn't sound so forbidden, so out of reach. He finds himself daydreaming about it. He's already considered the fact that his quirk might have a limit, but it would likely be time based, not a total number of maximum uses. Maybe if he dies in quick succession, too quickly for his quirk to rewind time, he'll stay dead. He doesn't plan to push it, not like that, but he figures that between jumping off the roof and getting blown up by Kacchan, he probably was alive only five minutes. As long as he doesn't push that boundary, doesn't try anything funny like killing himself five times in five seconds, he should be fine.

He's already considered the fact that his quirk is likely time related, in general. He's not reviving after dying; he's *rewinding* to before he died in the first place. It's different from a regeneration quirk because it means that nobody will ever have to know. It also means he won't heal from wounds, and that if he does die, he doesn't necessarily know how far back he'll be when he wakes up. He's okay with that, though. So far it seems that he's rewound the minimum amount back to prevent him from immediately dying again, which should give him time to make minor changes to actions. He wonders if, with training, he could control where it rewinds to. He doesn't know where to start with that, though.

The final bell ringing jolts him out of his thoughts, and he hears someone laugh at whatever face he must be making. He feels his cheeks color, realizing that a group of about four kids is staring at him, grins on their faces. Kacchan is there, too, but he's just sitting on his desk and staring at Izuku with a blank look.

“Hey, Deku,” one of the other boys says, slamming a hand down on his desk. “Still trying to study quirks? Didn’t we tell you that was a waste of time?”

Izuku looks up at him and swallows. He’d avoided major beatings since the sludge villain incident, and honestly, he isn’t really looking forward to the next one.

“Oi.” Izuku snaps his head around to look at Kacchan, who’s standing next to his chair instead of sitting in it. “Deku is *mine* today. None of you extras are gonna interfere, got it?”

The guy leaning on Izuku’s desk backs up, raising both hands. “Alright, fine. But you gotta save some of the fun for the rest of us, Bakugou.”

Kacchan just snarls at him, and he shrugs in response, walking out of the classroom. The rest of the class drains out after him, but Izuku just stares at Kacchan where he’s standing in front of his desk, glaring down at Izuku.

“What did you think you were fucking doing?” Kacchan asks, his lip curling over his teeth.

“W-What?” Izuku asks, confused. He scoots his chair back slightly so he can stand up if he needs to, but Kacchan leans forward and grabs his collar in one hand, dragging him forward until they’re both leaning over the desk.

“With the fucking sludge villain. What the *fuck* was that?” Kacchan snarls, and Izuku can smell his breath, can feel the moisture on his face.

Izuku screws his eyes shut. “You j-just... you l-looked like you n-needed help...”

He braces himself for a hit, but Kacchan just drops him, and he’s so startled by it that he almost knocks his chin against the desk. He glances up, startled, and see Kacchan stomping out of the classroom.

“Stay out of my fucking way, Deku!” Kacchan shouts when he sees Izuku looking. “I didn’t need any fucking *help* .” He says it like it’s poisonous, then turns and walks out the classroom door. Izuku stares. He feels like he has *deja vu*, which is kind of funny because while he has lived through some stuff twice, this particular encounter isn’t one of those times.

--

Izuku gets the idea one evening when he’s in his room, tucked under a blanket and watching hero videos on his phone. He watches Mt. Lady slam a villain into the ground and he thinks, *maybe I could do that* .

Not the slamming into the ground. He’s not strong enough for that, but it occurs to him that it’s not like he could *die* . He wouldn’t be in any danger, as a hero. He couldn’t get hurt. He could throw himself into dangerous rescues and not only would he survive, he would *get multiple tries* . He shuts his phone off and stares into the blackness of his room.

He could be a hero. It’s not unattainable but the thing is, he doesn’t want to be a hero with a quirk. He wants to be the first *quirkless* hero, he realizes, clenching his hands into fists and staring at his dark ceiling. Even if he isn’t *actually* quirkless, he’ll essentially be fighting like he is. His quirk isn’t any good in combat or rescue, not unless he literally dies. His quirk also leaves no evidence that he knows of. Nobody would know.

And even if he isn’t actually quirkless, he thinks, wouldn’t it be nice for the quirkless kids growing up? Wouldn’t it help them, even if they’re still bullied and told they’re useless and beaten up?

Wouldn't it help *someone* , for there to be a publicly quirkless hero?

So he decides right then, bundled up in his comforter, in the dark in his room after school. He's going to apply to UA. He's going to get in. He'll get multiple tries, won't he? If he messes up the first time, well.... He can just take a swan dive off a roof and hope for better luck in the next life.

He realizes though, that he has no practice. No training, and no quirk to compensate for his lack of ability. He could probably get into UA with enough tries anyway, but he doesn't know how far back he'll reset. What if it's midway through the test, and he can't prepare at all no matter what? He needs to train, somehow.

He turns over in bed, shuts his eyes. He'll figure something out. He always does.

--

Dagobah Beach is an ugly, messy thing. The junk heaps covering the expanse of it all are unsightly, and the stench of the rotting seaweed mixed with old garbage is enough to make Izuku gag as he picks his way through the trash to the shore, where clear water brushes up against his shoes. He stares at it. He'd thought the water would be nasty too, for some reason, but it's sparkling and clear, like glass. The sand underneath is a pale brown, speckled with bits of shells. Seafoam clings to the sand when the water pulls back, looking like suds from a bath.

He's come up with a couple of ideas since he had his realization about being a hero. The first is to clean the beach. It's messy, and it's local enough that not a lot of people go here, anyway. Nobody else is cleaning it up. It'll help him train his body.

Second, he thinks he's going to start exploring the streets at night. Nothing crazy; he's not going to go looking for dark alleyways to get abducted in. But now he doesn't have to be afraid of getting killed in some damp corner. He can get a feel for what it looks like, at night, when crime actually takes place. He'll have to be a popular hero, a famous one, for his quirklessness to actually help things for other quirkless kids out there, but he thinks... well. Some part of him, at least, feels sick at the idea of smiling and laughing and praising All Might in public. It had started with vague disappointment, after All Might told him he couldn't be a hero, but it twisted into something like resentment the more he thought about it. Izuku leans down, picking up an empty beer can and shoving it into the black plastic garbage bag he'd brought with him, grimacing. He'll need to buy gloves unless he wants to get his hands cut up.

Cleaning the beach is hard work. He expected it to be difficult because some of the stuff is heavy, but it's also a lot of walking. His garbage bag gets full really quickly, and he has to walk back to his house. His mom opens the door for him, smiling.

"Oh, Izuku," she says, ushering him inside. "How's the cleaning going?"

He smiles at her. "It's okay! I need to get more garbage bags, though." He'd told her about what he was doing this morning before he headed out, and she thought it was a wonderful idea.

"Of course," he says, ducking into the kitchen. "Should I just give you the whole box?"

"Yes please!" He chirps back, and he enjoys the cool breeze of the air conditioning while he waits. He hears the cabinet door shut and his mom's footsteps as she walks back over to him.

"Here you go, sweetie!" She hands him the box with a grin. "Don't forget to stay hydrated! Oh, and if you get hungry, there's onigiri in the fridge."

He nods, smiling at her. "Thanks, mom!" He waves at her and ducks back outside, hopping down

the steps and back to the beach.

It goes faster from that point, since he's getting used to the routine. He's starting with the small stuff, little pieces that broke off of things and litter that washed up on shore, but he can see the difference in the beach after only a few hours. There's more space to walk between the junk, less wrappers and empty bottles scattered in the sand. He thinks it might smell a little better, too, but that might just be his nose getting used to the stench.

By the time the sun is low in the sky, hanging over the horizon and painting everything in bright peach hues, he's tired and sweaty but feels good. He feels like he's doing something. He might not have done much, but it's better than nothing, right?

He sleeps deeply that night, dreaming of UA and heroism for the first time since he died.

--

A few nights later, he's on the streets. It's after dark, and he feels a little bad about sneaking out through his window, but he knows it would only worry his mom if she knew he was out this late in the night. It's just past 11 p.m., and the sky is as dark as it ever gets in the city. The moon is fat and bright in the sky, not quite full but almost there. Izuku walks through the street, hands tucked in his hoodie pockets. He feels a little weird, walking this route when it's dark instead of during the day on the way to school, but it's also strangely relaxing. He knows he isn't going to run into his bullies, at least.

That's probably why he's surprised when he hears the sounds of an argument, low and muffled. He stops, turns and slowly walks in the direction of the noise, pressing his back to the brick wall that borders the next turn. He hears the voices more clearly now, and he knows they're just around the next corner.

"Dude," the first voice says, pleading and nervous. "I swear, I'll have enough money next week. I really thought I'd have enough by now, I swear." Izuku hears the sound of something clicking. It sounds familiar, but he can't place it.

"Is that so," another voice replies, this one lower and rougher. "It's too bad that I'm impatient." Izuku winces as he hears a sickening thud, like someone had just hit human flesh with something heavy. Without giving himself a chance to think about it, Izuku glances around the corner, trying to keep himself hidden.

He sees two men, both fairly fit, but one is a lot taller than the other and holding a *gun*. Izuku feels the blood drain from his face as he realizes the sound he heard earlier must have come from the man messing with it. It's a shiny black handgun, and from the smear of blood on the butt of it and the bruising cut on the smaller man's forehead, the larger man had just hit him with it. Neither of them seem to notice Izuku as he glances over the situation. They're both dressed in casual clothes, but the larger man is wearing a leather jacket and heavy boots, while the smaller one wears nothing to protect his arms and has on sandals.

Only one of them knew to expect a fight, he realizes, and his breath catches in his throat when the larger man fiddles with the gun, making another clicking noise.

"Y'know what time it is?" The man asks, cocking the gun and pointing it at the smaller man's head. The smaller man just shakes his head, biting at his lip and raising his hands in a pleading gesture.

Izuku moves before he can think, his legs not obeying his orders to stay still. He rushes out,

tackling the smaller man to the ground just as the larger man shoots, the gunshot loud and painful in his ears. He winces as he lands on his butt, the smaller man right next to him, looking dazed.

“Run!” Izuku says, his voice quieter than he’d meant. “Get out of here!” He shoves at the smaller man, shocked when the guy stands up and complies with his orders. He sprints out of the alleyway, whimpering.

Izuku sighs a breath of relief, then looks up. The larger man has his jaw clenched, and he’s shaking with rage, his pupils tiny pinpricks.

“Fucking *kid*,” he snarls, and that’s the only warning Izuku gets before the back of the gun is whacked against his cheek, painful and hot. “What the fuck do you think you’re doing?”

Izuku reaches up a hand to touch his cheek. He feels blood, and weirdly enough the only thing he can think about is that his mom will be worried about the cut. He stares up at the man, and he realizes he’s started to tremble.

“I, um, I-I,” he bites his lips. “I’m s-sorry,” he says, pleading with his eyes.

The man groans, then kicks Izuku in the stomach. “God, I’m not going to shoot a fucking *kid*. Stay the fuck out of my way!” He kicks Izuku again, this time hitting his ribs and knocking him a few feet back. He grunts and starts away, headed in the direction the smaller man ran off in, but not even walking particularly fast. Izuku stares after him.

What on earth was I thinking? He wonders, reaching up to feel his cheek again. The adrenaline pumping through his veins is dulling the pain, making him feel like a live wire. It’s not like it would have helped the other guy if Izuku had died. Everything would have just reset, so why did he bother?

Except, Izuku thinks, I didn’t die. It’s strange, to think he might have saved a life tonight. Even if the larger man catches up with the smaller guy now, maybe there was at least a chance to call the cops. Izuku wonders, for a moment, if he could do it again. If he could go find another fight, break it up with his body. Either he dies and nothing happens, or he lives and he’s saved someone. It’s a win-win.

Well. More of a win-neutral, anyway. Izuku stands up, wincing at the way his ribs ache. Those would bruise in the morning. It isn’t the worst he’s had, though.

He starts to walk back home, picking his way through the streets, and if he starts thinking about what he’d need to do to conceal his identity if he kept this up, well, that’s nobody’s business but his own.

--

Izuku feels silly, at the costume store. He’s one of the only people in the store in the first place, and considering that it’s late February, nobody is getting a costume for Halloween or Hero Day. It’s chilly outside today, and Izuku is honestly kind of enjoying the heating in the costume store. He’d walked here as soon as school let out, but his uniform isn’t quite warm enough for this weather. He’ll have to keep that in mind when designing his costume, he thinks.

Izuku doesn’t need to get everything from here, anyway. He’s already placed orders online for a long sleeved black shirt that had a high collar and was made of “activewear material,” whatever that meant. He’s already got a pair of black boots in his closet, a gift from his mom for Christmas. They’d be perfect for vigilante work, although his mom had gotten them with the intent of him

using them at UA.

Vigilante work, huh? He thinks, smiling to himself as he pulls a matching pair of red gloves out of a bin. He's not sure he really considers what he's planning vigilante work, exactly, but that's the closest description he'd come up with, anyway.

He's already decided that his nighttime outfit needs to be as different as possible from his daylight costume. He's been planning something green and All Might inspired for his hero costume for ages, and he knows that even though All Might isn't his favorite any more, he's more than a little attached to the designs he's made. For his vigilante work, then, he'd decided on a red and black theme. The black because it'd be easier to blend in with the shadows and the red because it's the opposite of his green daylight concept. The gloves he's holding, clearly an adaptation on workout gloves but dark crimson red for hero cosplay, are a perfect touch. He'll need something like this to prevent fingerprints.

He holds on to the gloves and walks over to a display of belts. Most of them are styled after specific heroes; this shop specializes in cosplay, after all. There's also plain belts in most colors, though, for cosplaying lesser known heroes or for other uses. Izuku picks out one that matches his gloves and has a good number of pouches and hooks on it. He thinks it's supposed to be an imitation of one of the ones Crimson Riot used to wear, but he isn't totally sure. It's made of woven fabric, and the tag says it's fireproof, as is usually required for costume material. Izuku remembers reading about it in class. Since people in costumes tend to use their quirks, either for hero work or for reenactments, they're supposed to be at least minimally resistant to fire, to the point where they wouldn't instantly go up in flames on contact with fire. It'll be good enough for what Izuku is doing.

He looks over the pants briefly, but he's decided to just wear a pair of sturdy black jeans, anyway. He hasn't really worn them out before, since he's usually in his uniform or workout clothes lately, so they wouldn't be recognizable to his daytime identity, anyway. He walks over to a display of masks.

Most of them aren't suitable. They either don't cover enough, imitate a hero, or they look like they'd make fighting hard. He stops when he sees a display of face masks modelled after surgical masks, just plain ones that cover your mouth and nose. He pauses, grabbing a plain black one and holding it. He'd need another piece to cover his eyes, but...

He glances around, spotting a display of safety glasses and goggles. He grins. Eye protection is a good idea anyway, and this way he won't have to worry about his face or his eyes giving him away. He glances over the options for a moment before selecting a pair of reflective goggles, a shiny red mirror that shows his own face. He tries them on, and they aren't tinted, which will be great for night time. He carefully puts the goggles in his growing armful of stuff, then turns to get his last item.

He goes to a display of wash-out hair dye and grabs the largest, multi-use bottle of black dye they have. He knows that out of anything, with everything covering his body and face, his hair would be the most likely to give it away. Curly hair alone, in a plain unassuming black, though? It'd do the trick.

He goes to the checkout counter and dumps everything he's bought on the glass surface. The guy behind the register looks bored as he rings everything up.

"Who're you dressing up as?" He asks, then reads the total cost to Izuku.

"He's an original character," Izuku says, smiling as he hands over the money.

Izuku waits to go out in his costume until the beach is nearly halfway clear and his muscles no longer ache when he tries to move some of the bigger things. He hasn't been able to budge some of the objects, but he knows he'll get there.

That's why he's doing this now. It'll let him train parts of him that the beach doesn't, like stealth and dexterity. He hops out of his window and onto the soft path of dirt beneath him. He's wearing his long sleeved shirt, a maroon hoodie, black jeans, his boots, and the utility belt he'd bought. The mask and reflective goggles have his face covered, and his hair is dyed a deep black that doesn't show a lick of green in the dim light. He's pulled it back into what must be the world's tiniest ponytail, his mom's hair tie at the nape of his neck and just *barely* holding everything in, but he knows he's completely unrecognizable, which is exactly the point.

He steps onto the street, glancing around to double check that he's alone before he starts along the road, walking with his shoulders straight and his hands in his pockets. The gloves, hoodie, and mask together help, but the air still chills his skin, and he picks up the pace into a light jog, his boots tapping on the concrete. His breath comes easier than it would have even a few weeks ago, before he started cleaning up the beach. He relishes the sting of the cold air in his throat, and he catches himself smiling as he jogs along.

Unsurprisingly, the streets are pretty quiet. The area of Musutafu that he and his mom live in is a calm, residential area. He's thought about the act of *finding* crime itself quite a lot. He must have been lucky to stumble on that fight the first night; it wouldn't necessarily be easy to find these things in the first place. After all, part of the goal of the criminals would be to stay hidden, wouldn't it?

The crickets chirping in the long grasses poking out between the sidewalk and the wall seem to agree with him, singing happily in their homes. He can hear his footsteps echoing against the concrete ground and the brick walls that border the yards in this part of the city, too loud in the night. He'll need to learn how to walk more quietly, he thinks.

He turns down a road that he knows leads into the nastier part of the city, even if it is still a few blocks away. The buildings up ahead went up quickly, cheaply constructed from concrete and iron. They look like they're older than they are, with vines twisting on some of their sides and cracks on others. This is where the people who can't afford to live anywhere else go, where the seediest bars and the strangest clubs lurk. If he's going to find crime, it'll be over here.

It takes him the better part of an hour to find anything, and that's probably why he finds himself about to keep walking when he hears it. It's hard to tell what exactly he hears that sounds off. He stops, standing under a streetlight that casts a yellow light over the ground, flickering ever so slightly. He can hear the bulb inside buzzing, and watches as a group of moths bump around the light, knocking into the case surrounding it. They look black on the bright backdrop of the light, orange-yellow and flickering as it is. Izuku watches a moth circle it lazily as he listens to what sounds like a group of guys joking around.

The voices are coming from the alleyway just past the streetlight, and Izuku really isn't sure why he's stopped in the first place. It sounds like just two or three guys, and he hears one of them laugh, happy and deep. *They're probably just drunk and playing around*, he thinks, and he goes to move on when he hears something else.

He can't be quite sure, but he thinks he hears a woman's voice, pleading and squeaky. He thinks that he must have heard it before, but not registered it consciously, and he strains to listen as he slips into the alleyway pressing himself against the building closest to him, the concrete surface

smooth and cool. The shadow of the building seems to do a good job of keeping him hidden, because as he inches along the alleyway, none of the people at the end of it seem to see or hear him.

He can see three men, just teenagers, really. He thinks they might be 16 or 17; not much older than him. They're laughing, shoving at each other, and grinning, but what makes Izuku grit his teeth and inch closer is the woman they're cornering against a wall. She's their age, dressed in similar clothes to them, too. Izuku notes that they're all wearing the same uniform under their jackets. *They're probably from the same high school*, he registers, creeping closer.

He kneels behind a dumpster that blocks his path along the side of this building. It stinks of rotten food, but he's used to it after all of that time on the beach. He can hear the conversation much more clearly from here, and he studies the shadows of the guys' legs as they move, cool black on the cool grey concrete. The light seems to be coming mostly from the moon up above; Izuku can't see even a hint of the yellow from the streetlight.

"Come *on*," one of the guys says, his voice nasally and high. "You should come back to my place with us. It'll be fun," he says, a smile in his voice.

"I-I told you," the girl replies, voice wavering. "I want to go home."

One of the guys snorts, and Izuku hears what sounds like someone kicking the ground, a large scuffing noise. "Oh, really?" A different guy speaks. "You're going to let us get this far and then reject us? Not cool." This guy sounds older than the other one, although not by much.

"Dude, let's just take her," the third man says. "With my quirk, we can just--"

Izuku hears the girl shriek, then get cut off like something covered her mouth. He grits his teeth, then scoots forward on his feet to peer around the dumpster.

The tallest of the guys, a skinny one wearing a yellow hoodie, has a hand raised, each finger turning into a thick rope that extends over to where the girl is pressed against the wall in fear. Three ropes are wrapped around her forearms and waist, binding them together, and the other two are wrapped around her mouth like a gag.

"Nice," the second voice whistles from where he's watching wearing a green windbreaker. "Let's--"

And that's when Izuku moves, even though he doesn't know how he's going to swing this or how on earth he's going to get that girl out of harm's way. He runs at the man with the rope-hand quirk, launching himself up onto the man's shoulders and then leaning backward, trying to pull him *down*. It works, but he lands on top of Izuku and he's heavy. Izuku hits the ground and gasps, feeling all of the air pushed out of his lungs at once. The man he pulled over screams, and the one with the green jacket shouts, but all Izuku cares about as he cranes his neck up to look is if the woman got away.

He sees her, ropes loosened but not dropped. She struggles for a second, then gets her hands out of the ropes and pushes them off of her. She starts to try and run, but the first guy to speak catches her, his denim jacket almost grey in the darkness. He grabs her shoulders and grips her what must be painfully tight, and Izuku grits his teeth, kicking at the body squirming on top of him.

He feels an impact on his stomach as the man kicks at him, but the motion frees him from the man's weight. Izuku pushes himself up into a crouch, then springs back when the yellow-hoodie guy, still on the ground, throws a messy punch at his face. His hands, Izuku notes, aren't rope all of

the time, and as he jumps to his feet he wonders why the guy wouldn't have used his quirk on him. *Maybe he forgot .*

Izuku scrambles back, shooting a glance to where the girl is struggling to get out of her captor's arms, kicking back at his shins and biting his arm where it's holding her. The man screams, and Izuku realizes that the girl's teeth are unnaturally sharp, arranged like fangs on a cartoon vampire. It must be part of her quirk, and the guy quickly drops her, swearing and pressing a hand to the bleeding wound in his forearm.

"Son of a *bitch* !" he curses, turning to run after her, but Izuku dives at his legs, trying to somewhat repeat his stunt from earlier with the rope-hand guy. It doesn't knock bleeding arm guy over, though, just sends him stumbling back a few steps, grunting in surprise.

"Fucking brat," someone spits from just behind Izuku, and suddenly the breath is knocked out of him, a sneakered foot digging into his ribs with a strong kick. Izuku is knocked away from the guy with the bleeding arm, and he lands on his ass, one hand bracing himself and the other raised to try and block any incoming hits. He winces as another foot comes flying at him, this one aimed at his face, and his hand softens the blow but gives him a flare of pain in his palm.

"What," the guy with the green windbreaker sneers, "do you think you're some kind of *hero* ? Dressed up in that bullshit?" He kicks Izuku's shin.

"God *damn* ," bleeding arm guy says, hand still clamped over his arm. "I'm gonna have to get fucking stitches."

Izuku pushes himself off the ground, trying to get up so he can run *away* , but he feels something rough and tight wrap around his thigh and yank him back to the ground. He looks up to see the guy with the ropes for hands leering down at him, his lip bloody where he must have bit it when Izuku knocked him over. He feels dread pool in the pit of his stomach when he realizes he's not only cornered, but also caught, and he reaches his hands down to try and loosen the rope wrapped around his thigh, just above the knee. He scrabbles at it, but he can't even get his gloved hands underneath the rope; it's too tight. He glances back up, looking desperately for an escape route, but the three men are all facing him now, windbreaker guy with a terrifying grin on his face.

Bloody arm guy spits at him, and Izuku turns his head just in time to avoid the spit hitting his face. He's glad he did when he hears a sizzle where the spit landed on the wall behind him, and he can't see it but he can smell something sulfurous. He clenches his jaw and hopes that they kill him quickly so he can try again. Maybe next time, he'll be smart enough to bring a weapon at least. He's practically fighting quirkless, as is.

Rope guy yanks, and Izuku shuts his eyes and braces himself as he's dragged across the dirty concrete. He feels someone stomp down on his stomach, and then abruptly, he hears a shout and the weight is gone. The rope around his thigh loosens, and he opens his eyes in surprise.

He sees something that looks like bandages floating in the air around him, a thick, canvas-like fabric that whips around and wraps around rope guy. Izuku sits up, pushing himself back and away from the other two guys, but it doesn't seem to matter because they both turn and start to run.

"Not so fast," a low, adult voice growls, and Izuku watches as a man clad in all black with golden goggles steps out from behind rope guy, brandishing the fabric. It quickly snaps to wrap around the other two, tying bloody arm guy and windbreaker guy together in one wrapping of white material. Izuku scrambles up to his feet, watching as the new man's black hair falls down from where it had been floating above his head, landing on his shoulders in a mess of black curls.

The man steps into the alleyway, his face turned to Izuku, now. Izuku bites his lip and he presses himself to the wall of the alley. Suddenly, it clicks. He recognizes him.

“Eraserhead,” he breathes, and Eraserhead quirks an eyebrow at him. “The erasure hero.” It occurs to him all at once that not only is he dressed like a wannabe hero (or villain) in front of an actual pro who he is a fan of, but also that Eraserhead is quite possibly the most dangerous person in the entire world for him. If he erases Izuku’s quirk and Izuku dies, he wouldn’t come back.

“The girl said someone wearing a cosplay had saved her,” Eraserhead says, voice unreadable. “I guess that’s you.”

“T-That’s me,” Izuku replies, voice shaky. He takes a few steps along the wall, testing to see if Eraser will stop him. The man doesn’t move, and Izuku takes it as a sign. He breaks into a sprint, running from the alleyway as fast as he can. He passes under the flickering street lamp, listening for footsteps behind him, but he doesn’t hear any. It’s cold outside, and it stings his skin but not as much as his ribs and thigh ache. He feels like he can still smell that one guy’s blood, can still smell the stench of the dumpster, and he runs the entire way home.

When he gets back, he hauls himself through the window, adrenaline still pumping through his veins. His heart pounds in his ears as he rips off the goggles and mask, as he tiptoes to the bathroom and turns the shower on the hottest temperature, even though it could wake his mom up. His heart rate doesn’t come back to normal until he’s standing under the spray, black hair dye washing out and running down his skin in dark rivulets. The bruises forming on his abdomen and thigh are bright red, turning violet in spots.

When he sleeps, he dreams of the look on the girl’s face when she got away.

Chapter End Notes

content warnings for implied sexual assault. nothing is graphic and nothing actually happens!

im going to try to update at least once a week for this, but obviously it's only been a day! i hope you enjoyed <3

springtime

Chapter Summary

last time - izuku saves a girl from three men and meets eraserhead

Chapter Notes

just a heads up, i will be deviating pretty heavily from canon as far as events go! i want to keep the characterization, but i dont intend on just rewriting canon events but with izuku's new quirk. this is going to take a different path and have a different story. some events, like the entrance exam, are of course unavoidable though!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Izuku is *sore* the next day, sore in a way that he's only ever been after his worst beatings from his bullies. Oddly enough, the bullying has slowed down since he found out about his quirk, even though none of them know. He wonders how much it has to do with the way Kacchan is avoiding him. He wonders if they're planning something big.

He rolls out of bed and his stomach feels like it's been branded, poked with a red-hot iron and singed until the bones beneath are burned too. It makes him hiss, taking in air sharply and squeezing his eyes shut to push away the pain. Something about it is satisfying, though. If he'd ignored the situation, wouldn't that girl be in just as much pain or more? *Isn't it better if it's me?*

School goes by in a blur. His bullies sneer at him, whisper about him in the halls, but nobody trips him or hits him or confronts him directly. It's easier to ignore when it's like this, when they're barely even bothering him. He's swept away in his head, reliving that fight over and over again. If he'd had a knife, he could have just cut the ropes. If he'd had any kind of weapon, really, he'd be able to fight back more effectively. Being functionally immortal doesn't really help if he can't actually fight in the first place, does it?

So when school lets out, when it's late afternoon and the sky is a sodden grey with rain spilling out of the clouds and dripping in silver puddles on the sidewalk, Izuku hurries through the damp streets to a store that he knows sells knives. He remembers going there with his mom when one of their kitchen knives had gotten so dull it wouldn't really cut the vegetables right, and this store had whetstones. He remembers staring at the display of utility knives, kitchen knives, and some that were probably mostly for display, seeing as he's pretty sure they're illegal to take in public.

By the time he gets to the storefront, the shoulders of his uniform and his hair are soaked through, and he's shaking with the cold. He pushes open the door of the store and a bell tied to the top chimes softly. It's warm inside, white-yellow light spilling out through the glass doors and onto the street outside. Izuku shivers despite the warm air.

"Welcome," a woman behind a counter says to him, smiling at him behind square glasses. She sets down a calculator, placing it on top of a piece of paper heavily covered in pencil marks and ink, and she steps out from behind the counter. There's a black apron dusted with some grey and white

powders wrapped around her, covering a flowery blouse and a pair of well-worn jeans. She looks like a high schooler, maybe a first year college student.

“Is there anything I can help you find?” she asks, a polite smile on her lips. She pushes one of her low pigtails back behind her shoulder.

“Um,” Izuku says, eloquently. He’s not used to talking to girls, much less pretty ones. “I came to get some knives?”

She tilts her head at him. “What kind were you looking for?”

Izuku swallows. “Something I-I could use f-for self defense,” he answers, voice quiet.

Her smile drops and she nods seriously, like she gets it. “Let me show you what we have,” she says, gesturing for him to follow as she walks down an aisle of steel shelves. Izuku realizes that the store is mostly hardware and weapons in the first place, and he figures that’s why they’ve only ever gone the one time. He and his mom don’t really have use for weapons, and their landlord is good about repairs when things do break. He eyes the plumbing material, looks at how many different shapes of piping and connectors there are and decides it’s for the best that he’s never had to mess with it.

She stops in front of a board that has display shelves built into it, each shelf holding a number of knives. Izuku recognizes it from years ago, when he’d come here with his mom, but the order of things is all different and the knives seem smaller. It’s intimidating, how many options there are.

“What kind of budget are you working with?” She asks, and Izuku tells her how much money he’s willing to spend. She nods, looking over the knives thoughtfully.

“You’ll want something easy to conceal, to carry with you. No point in having a knife for self defense if it’s never there for you to use, right?.” She reaches up to the shelf and takes down a knife with a blade about as long as Izuku’s palm, the handle a little longer than the blade. It’s simple, straight, and he watches as she folds the blade easily into the handle.

“I like this one because it has a good weight to it,” she says, voice a mumble, almost like she’s not talking to him. “It’s easy to open, too,” and she flicks a button and snaps her wrist, the knife opening easily. She snaps it shut with both hands, then offers it to him.

Izuku takes it. “T-Thank you..” he says, holding the metal knife in his hand. The handle is black and textured for grip, cold and weighty in his hand. He copies what she did earlier, trying to snap the knife open with a flick of the wrist, but it doesn’t open.

She chuckles. “Sorry. I should have said, it’s hard to open it with one hand if you haven’t practiced,” she rubs a hand on the back of her head, and for the first time Izuku notices a large, yellowing bruise on the inside of her wrist. He wonders if she gets bullied, too.

Izuku swallows, then opens the knife with both hands. The blade is so shiny that it almost looks *soft*, and he can see his wavering reflection in it along with the glowing reflections of the industrial lights above them. The blade snaps into place. The weight of it feels foreign in his hands, but it also feels good. It smells like iron.

“Oh, and if you get that, you should have some extra cash,” she says, and Izuku carefully presses the button and closes the knife, holding it in his palm. He watches as she leans up and takes another knife down from the top shelf. She turns to him, a small smile on her face as she offers him a strange looking weapon. The handle is shaped like a grip, with grooves for each of his fingers,

and the blade sticks out between where his middle and ring fingers would go, a thin, double-sided blade of silvery metal.

“This one’s for punching,” she says, her voice picking up excitedly. “These are so fun, really, and if you know how to throw a punch you’ll be fine using it.” She grips it in her hand, showing Izuku the way it fits her fist and sticks out from her fingers, wicked sharp. He wonders, briefly, if it’s legal for him to have these.

“I-I’ll take them both,” he says, and she smiles wide at him.

“Great! I’ll get you ringed up,” she says, holding out a hand and offering the strange punching-knife. He takes it from her gingerly.

She turns and walks back to the register, and he follows, glancing at all of the other stuff in the store. They sell bullets, strangely, but not guns, and he sees a lot of mismatched stuff around the place. Like fishing tackle, even though there isn’t much fishing around here. It’s odd, but certainly not the strangest thing he’s seen.

When he catches up to her at the register, she’s sliding a sheath across the glass counter.

“For the one that doesn’t fold!” She says, smiling. “This way you don’t accidentally cut yourself.” Izuku takes it with a shaky nod, and watches as she types things into her calculator, scribbling down notes as she goes.

“Alright!” She says, and gives him the total. He hands over the cash, and she opens the register drawer with a ding, stuffing the bills into their over-full drawers.

When he goes home, after he thanks her and walks through the rainy streets of Musutafu, after he takes his damp shoes off and reassures his mom that he wasn’t out in the rain for long enough to get sick, he places the knives in pouches on his utility belt. He sits in his room at his desk and googles how to use knives in combat, how to throw a punch and how to defend himself. He might have a quirk, but he can’t rely on it for every situation. Endless tries mean nothing if he loses every time, right?

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The next time he goes out on the streets, he’s more careful. He keeps his hand on his belt, next to his knives, and he walks through the streets more cautiously, looking down alleyways even if all he hears is talking. It’s darker than that night with the three men and the girl because he had to wait until the bruises on his stomach healed enough that he could fight if he needed to, so he could move freely. The moon is a thin slit in the sky, silvery white where it hovers among the stars. Izuku walks through the streets, careful not to let his feet drag against the ground. The city is loud even at night, and he can hear the heavy bass of the music playing in a nearby club. The lights of billboards and open signs paints the streets, still damp from the rain that morning and the morning before that, in a rainbow of bright colors streaking across puddles and reflecting off of the dark ground.

Izuku hears the fight before he sees it, just like the last time. It sounds different though, like two men growling and shouting at each other, like the sounds of fists meeting flesh. Izuku turns down the street the sounds are coming from the second he hears it, and he doesn’t have to bother hiding himself because the two guys brawling it out in front of a bar aren’t even looking. There’s blood dripping down one of their noses, running down his already stained white shirt and dropping onto the concrete. The air smells like alcohol and sweat, salty and volatile.

Izuku draws his knife, the normal one, and opens it before getting closer. He holds it by his side, hand turned out so the blade catches the light of the bar, the neon pink and bright red lights that decorate the front of the building. He angles the light so it reflects into one of the guy's eye, stopping a few feet from them.

"Break it up," he says, trying to make his voice lower than it really is. The guy with the bloody nose pauses, and the guy who isn't bleeding follows suit. They both stare at him, clearly drunk. They're swaying.

"Who the fuck are you?" One of them asks, swaying.

"Doesn't matter," Izuku says. "Stop fighting." He raises the knife, pointing it at them, and it seems to do the trick. The two of them glance at each other, and the man with the bloody nose huffs, turning and walking away. The other guy turns and walks back into the bar, slamming the door behind him. Izuku stares for a moment, then turns and walks the opposite direction from where the bloody nose dude went.

It's a strange sensation, having people listen to him. He kind of likes it.

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Studying for the entrance exam is something Izuku saves mostly for the weekends, when he doesn't have school to take up his daytime. He spends his afternoons on the beach cleaning and his evenings sleeping and patrolling the streets, with not a moment to spare for studying or relaxing. So, it's a lazy Sunday morning that finds him hunched over his notebooks at his desk, reviewing his math over and over again. His back aches from sitting too long, and his left arm is bruised from blocking a hit the night before. He's still just breaking up fights and stopping little crimes, nothing crazy and nothing of note, but he keeps managing to get little injuries that annoy him and make cleaning the beach slow work. Watching self defense videos and using the knives helps; he hasn't had to cut anyone, yet, but they work wonderfully as a deterrent.

He shakes his head, forcing himself to refocus on the equation he's trying to figure out. It's been a few months since they went over this, but he can't help but feel stupid for not remembering such a simple concept. He knows this is on the UA entrance exam; according to an online forum he's always on, they include a few topics from each subject in the exam every year, and the rest vary. He wants to make sure that, if nothing else, his written exam is perfect. He knows he's not going to be able to rely on the practical portion, not with his quirk.

His vision is blurry, though, and his eyes sting and burn when he blinks. He squeezes his right hand tighter around the pencil, trying to ground himself and get his brain to work already. It doesn't work. He can feel the chair under his legs, the pencil tight in his hand, his nails biting into his palm, but he can't focus on the schoolwork in front of him. He knows, somewhere in his mind, that he's been working for too long, but he also knows he *has* to overwork himself to get into UA without a useful quirk. He doesn't have a choice.

A soft knock on the frame of his door pulls him out of his thoughts, and he turns to see his mom at the open door to his bedroom, a tray in her hands with a glass of iced water and a steaming bowl of rice. She smiles at him.

"Izuku," she says, stepping into his room and setting the tray on his desk. "You didn't eat anything for lunch." He watches a droplet of condensation roll down the surface of the glass.

"Thanks, mom," he says, looking up at her and giving her a huge grin. She smiles wider back at him and gives him a pat on the back.

“I know it’s important to you to get into UA, but don’t forget that your health is important too,” she says, glancing down at his notes. “Oh, is this what you’re working on?”

Izuku nods. “I can’t remember how to do it,” he admits, his face flaring red.

“Oh, well,” Inko says, picking up his pen. “I do something similar at work a lot. I can help you, if you want?”

Izuku nods. “Yes, please!”

When his mom walks him through the problem, writing her own neat notes next to his and telling him how she uses these for her own job, how she remembers the tricks and equations, it’s easier to focus. He gets through the material while he eats warm rice and drinks cold water, and before he knows it, his mom’s pulled up a chair and they’re working through all of that weekend’s tasks in just a few hours.

--

The last day of middle school is surreal. He sits through the closing ceremony in his uniform, feeling out of place. Feeling old. He doesn’t really listen to what anyone giving speeches says; he just sits and waits for it all to be over. High school will be better. *There’s nowhere to go but up from here, right?*

When the ceremony ends, he starts to walk home because where else would he go? It’s not like he has friends, except maybe Kacchan. Izuku honestly isn’t even sure if Kacchan counts, any more. He hasn’t really spoken to him except for snide comments, not since that day with the sludge villain. In some ways, Izuku is okay with it. He was getting tired of the bullying, of going home and hiding burns from his mom. *At least it gave me practice hiding the injuries*, he thinks. *And pain tolerance.*

He steps into the tunnel that he’d been attacked in on that fateful day, the shadow of the bridge above casting the walkway in soft grey shade. It’s an unseasonably warm day, and it’s pleasant to be in the shade as opposed to miserably cold as it would normally be this time of year. It’s earlier than when they normally get out of school, too, so that could be why. The cherry blossom trees have just started to bloom, and the wind brushes soft pink petals under the bridge in little drifts, almost like tiny snowflakes. Izuku watches them as he walks, drags his feet along and kicks them in front of him.

Maybe that’s why he doesn’t see the kids from his middle school until he literally runs into them. He steps back with a start and looks up in surprise to see three of the kids that have bullied him for the past three years, kicked him in the hallways, and held him while Kacchan burned him after school. He bites his lip and takes a step back.

“Deku,” one of the boys sneers, reaching out to grip his shoulder. “It’s been a while.” And it has. Izuku was starting to think he was free from all this.

Izuku pushes the boy’s hand off of him with his other hand, stepping back again. They draw closer, though, and he finds himself settling into the fighting stance he’s used at night, on the roads and in the alleyways. One of them, his shoulder-length brown hair pulled back in a ponytail, laughs at him.

“What, are you gonna fight back for once?” He shakes his head, turning to look at one of his buddies. “Wouldn’t it have made sense to do that at the beginning of school instead of the end? Stupid Deku.”

The other guy starts to laugh, and Izuku isn't entirely sure *why* he throws a punch at the guy whose head is still turned, but he does. His knuckles crack satisfyingly against his bully's face, and the kid stumbles back, gripping his face with a hand.

"What the hell?" One of the other kids throws a messy punch at him, but it's slow and weak compared to the grown adults Izuku's fought and intimidated the past month. He knocks it away with one hand and elbows the kid in the gut with the other arm. The guy grunts when it makes contact, folding over and gripping his stomach.

"God, what the *fuck*?" One of them asks, but Izuku doesn't waste any time. He pushes past them and *runs*, runs like he's never really dared to before.

He runs and runs, the trees all around him, budding green from the springtime warmth, blurring together with his speed. He runs, and he doesn't stop until he's far past his house, in the part of town that's loud and alive at night but quiet and sad during the day. He stops in front of a random building, a short, squat thing that has a closed sign in its window and is clearly some kind of nightclub. He catches his breath with his hands on his knees, gasping and blinking back tears. He feels sick when he thinks about what he's done; he fought back. *I'm really gonna get it tomorrow*, he thinks before he remembers that *oh, today was the last day. I'm free.*

He laughs. *I'm free!*, and then he drops to the ground, sitting with his knees pulled to his chest and laugh-crying to an abandoned street. He's sure he looks like a mess, his uniform messy from sitting in the dirt and his face surely red and streaked with tears, but he doesn't care. From now on, he doesn't have to deal with those kids and their fists. He doesn't have to deal with the whispers.

It'll be better at UA, he tells himself. *It has to be.*

--

A couple of nights later, he's in his costume and he feels so *alive*. The sounds of nighttime, of muffled music and dancing leaking through the walls of buildings, of flickering streetlights and quiet arguments, of crickets and cicadas hiding in the grass-- they sound like home to him now. He knows this part of town like the back of his hand, knows which bars usually have fights outside them and which alleyways people like to sell drugs in. He even knows which heroes patrol the area, and it isn't many. He's only seen Eraserhead that one time, and since then he's seen a couple of sidekicks. He supposes the higher ranking heroes prefer to work in the daytime, when they can get media recognition.

It's a quieter night, as far as partying goes. He thinks it's because it's a Wednesday night, and most people who have jobs or school can't be out too late during the weekdays. He's also out a little later than normal; he'd overslept. It's a cloudy night, making it darker than it should be, and the sky is an inky black mess of clouds above him. He wonders if it'll rain. He listens for the sounds of thunder, but all he hears is a shout. He turns his head in the direction it came from, looking through his goggles for any signs of a fight, but he's too far away.

He moves carefully down the street, keeping his steps even with the beat of the music from the nearest nightclub. This is the best way to conceal the noise his footsteps make, he's learned.

Suddenly, from behind a parked truck with its lights on, two projectiles shoot past him, moving so quickly he can't even see what they are. Izuku immediately drops into a fighting stance, his hand pulling his knives from his belt. He flicks open the one that folds, having finally mastered the trick the other day, and he tucks the one he can use for punching into his left hand. He creeps around the truck slowly, walking sideways to keep his body facing where the threat is.

He sees a huge beast of a man, easily over six feet tall and covered in bristling spines each about two feet in length and made of thick, keratinous material that shines in the light from the headlights of the truck. He's cornering four party goers, a man and three women, against a wall. *A hedgehog quirk?* Izuku thinks, then cringes as the man fires two spines forward, pinning the man to the concrete wall behind him. The spines dig deep into the concrete, cracking it with their force. *Porcupine*, his brain helpfully supplies as the man turns his angry glare to look at Izuku.

Izuku remembers what he heard in one of his videos- *if your opponent is skilled in ranged combat, get close* - so he does, dashing forward and sliding into the porcupine man's personal space. He slashes with the knife in his right hand but misses, just a few centimeters short.

The man growls and swings a fist at Izuku, and for all Izuku sees it coming, he can't dodge in time. The hit to his chest sends him stumbling back, and he barely has enough time to straighten back up before the man shoots a volley of three slick, dark brown spines at him. Izuku feels a rush of burning pain as they sink into him, one in his right thigh, one in his left calf, and the third at the bottom of his stomach, just above his left hip. He recognizes that he drops to the ground from the way his viewpoint gets lower, but all he can register is the white hot pain and the feeling of his insides grating on the spine embedded in his stomach when he gasps for air. He can't feel either of his legs except for the blinding pain, but he does feel when the man kicks him right where the spine is lodged in his belly, knocking it deeper and making Izuku gag from pain, throwing up his mom's cooking and sour acid all over the dirty ground.

He tries to pull himself away, crawling on the ground with his gloves soaked through with his own vomit and blood, but he doesn't get very far before his limbs stop responding to his requests. His hands grow weak, tingly, like they're falling asleep, and Izuku registers that he feels very, very cold. He tries to sit up, tries to do anything, but his body doesn't move except for a twitch. His vision is a swirling black, and he dry heaves, his stomach and throat spasming as he loses consciousness.

Chapter End Notes

content warning for vomiting and gore

porcupine

Chapter Summary

last time: izuku finishes middle school, gets killed

Chapter Notes

happy new year!! i hope this chapter finds you all well <3 i had a ton of fun writing it !

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

He gasps for breath and stumbles mid-step when he comes back to himself, his body aching for just a moment from phantom pain. He stops in place, staring ahead of him blankly. He's out already, in his costume with his hair dyed and pulled back, and he just died. This street is familiar to him, only a block from where he now knows a villain is waiting with four civilians and a quirk powerful enough to kill Izuku before he even got a hit in.

The thing is, as much as he'd planned to die over and over again if he needed to save people, it's different when he's just gone and done it. He has to sit down, wrapping his arms around his knees and drawing in shaky breaths. He can't quite get his heart to settle because all he can think about is the sensation of the villain's quills sinking into his flesh, cutting through muscle and organs. He swallows thickly and tries to push down the bile that rises in the back of his throat. This is his power. This is his quirk. *I have no right to be so upset by it.*

Izuku digs his fingers into his shins, feeling the pressure and the dull pain through his jeans. He focuses on it, lets it ground him. He feels his breath slow, feels his heart rate become steady, and only then he releases his grip on himself. He's still sitting on the ground, but he can think. He tilts his head back, looks up at the sky. The clouds drift lazily ahead, no urgency to them. He breathes, in and out. A single raindrop falls on his cheek, making his nose wrinkle and his eyes shut reflexively.

Izuku pulls himself to his feet and swallows his fear, walking back toward where he knows the villain is. *Porcupine*, he decides to call him, because it's not like he's going to ask the guy for his actual name. Izuku knows now that he's not going to win if he approaches head on, but he thinks he might be able to sneak up on the man if he comes from the other side of the truck, where the headlights won't illuminate him quite so much. Maybe if he can get the jump on the guy, if he can knock him out before he has the chance to shoot spines, he'll be able to take Porcupine down before Porcupine kills him.

He knows what to listen for this time as he approaches the truck, sneaking around the back side of it so he can avoid being seen. He hears the *thwack* from Porcupine pins the man to the wall, then another series of thumps. He grits his teeth and prays that none of the people Porcupine has cornered are hurt as he skirts the back of the truck, looking up over the bed of it to see Porcupine's back. It occurs to him that maybe trying to sneak up behind a villain whose entire back is covered in weapons may not be the best idea.

Izuku takes another step, and he sees the four civilians from last time, except the man Porcupine had pinned to the wall last time has a trio of spines embedded in his throat, all clustered together in one terrible wound. Even from this distance, the amount of blood that's spilled out from his body, coating his clothing and the ground below in a dark, sticky, red tells Izuku that he's dead. Izuku feels a wave of nausea pass over him, remembering the way it felt when the spines suck into his own flesh, when he grew cold and shaky and died. He swallows, heavy in his throat, because now he *has* to die, because he isn't going to let someone else die in his place. Their lives are worth more than his; after all, he has so *many* of them.

Izuku pulls out his knife and swallows. Just because he has to do this doesn't mean it isn't going to hurt. He debates trying to sneak closer, first, but then Porcupine flexes and a spine shoots out, just barely grazing the cheek of one of the women. She shrieks and steps back, presses herself against the wall. She and her friends are all wide-eyed and pale, huddled together and shaking. Izuku can't wait if it means they'll die.

He's throwing his knife at Porcupine before he can let himself think about it, rushing forward at the villain before he can even see if the knife hit or not. He hears a squelching noise as it embeds itself in Porcupine's back, just between two spines, and Porcupine shouts in surprise, his back bristling up and the spines scratching Izuku's arms. He doesn't stop, though, tugging his punching knife out from his belt and burying it deep in Porcupine's shoulder. Some part of him, as he tugs the knife out of the wound, wants Porcupine to run so he doesn't have to die again, but he pushes down the thought. The stab wound oozes red blood, and Izuku goes in for another stab just as Porcupine's hand wraps itself around his neck, pulling him away from the villain's side and moving him in front of Porcupine.

Izuku struggles, kicking his feet out and feeling satisfaction when his heel knocks into Porcupine's stomach, but it doesn't seem to even phase the villain. Izuku watches the rage flicker in his eyes before he slams Izuku to the ground, his shoulder and head knocking against the concrete, smearing in someone's blood. Izuku isn't sure if it's the dead man's, Porcupine's, or his own.

He pushes himself up off of the ground, his head spinning and the light from the truck headlights suddenly seeming brighter and multicolored. He reaches a hand up to his temple and feels a knot already forming, red-hot and angry. Porcupine growls from above him and buries his foot in Izuku's stomach, sending Izuku back onto his side on the ground, gasping for breath. The air he breathes in tastes like rotting blood.

Izuku shuts his eyes and curls in on himself, praying for Porcupine to just kill him quickly this time, to stab him somewhere vital and get it over with. He feels another kick, this one to his shins where they're protecting his stomach, then a burst of pain so strong he can't tell where it came from. He's dead in seconds, but it still hurts like a wildfire raging through his veins.

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The next time he wakes up, he doesn't waste a moment. He starts running the second his eyes open, the concrete pounding under his feet as the city whizzing by. He has to find a hero, a *real* hero who can actually fucking *save* those people. He doesn't have enough power to do anything here, not to save the civilians or defeat the villain. All he can do is die, and that doesn't solve anything if it won't save people.

He knows, *knows* he saw Burnin' earlier that night, but to his frustration, he can't remember when he saw her or exactly where, and he turns down the wrong street over and over again, mistaking the warm lights of a nightclub and a bar and then a streetlamp for her fire. He feels his chest aching from the exertion, feels the muscles in his legs burn from running for so long, but it feels like

nothing in comparison to being stabbed through. He finally catches her getting into a car, of all things, and he sees the look of surprise on her face when he rounds the corner, sweaty and exhausted and out of breath.

“Burning,” he gasps. “You need to c-come,” he takes in a breath, sees her step out of the car and back onto the asphalt, a confused look on her face. “There’s a villain, porcupine quirk, four civilians.” He can’t get any more out of her, but it seems to be enough because she nods and starts walking and he takes off running again even though his lungs try to tell him not to.

He hears her footsteps match his pace, sees the flickering light of her quirk illuminating the way as he runs, taking the shortest path to where he knows Porcupine is, but he knows from the sounds of two women screaming that he’s too late, even before he can see the truck. They round a corner and Burning passes him up as he freezes in horror. The man is dead, just like last time, his blood coating the wall. One of the women, a college aged girl with long blonde hair, is crumpled in a heap between the wall and the truck, her hair streaked with dark, dark blood and her arm pinned to the ground. There’s at least seven spines sticking out from her that Izuku can see, and he realizes with horror that she had tried to get away. He covers his mouth with a hand to stifle any noise he makes and turns, running from the scene. He doesn’t need to see if Burning wins to know that he has to start over. It’s too late.

He stumbles to the nearest building with an external fire escape, the metal stairs climbing up the seven stories. There are lights on in some of the windows, but he doesn’t want to wait to find a better option. He has no idea how long until this becomes permanent, until the blood of that man and that poor woman is on his hands. He climbs the stairs two at a time, his breath fogging his goggles where it leaks out from his mask. The view from the top is horrible; he can see the fire from where Burning is fighting, can hear the shouts and screams. He looks down and swallows. At least this way, he’s dead before he can feel any kind of pain.

He shuts his eyes and dives off, head first.

--

Izuku notes that he isn’t out of breath any more when he opens his eyes, and he makes use of that fact, turning on his heels and sprinting. Burning isn’t close enough, but that doesn’t mean nobody is. There *has* to be someone close enough, right? There has to be a way for him to save them.

Izuku spots a familiar convenience store, the lights inside spilling out through the glass doors and windows, the open signs flashing blue and green. He runs right up to the door and opens it, practically flinging himself inside. The heat of the air is too hot with all the adrenaline rushing through him, and the cashier, and older man with a bald head, looks terrified. Izuku realizes he probably looks a little like a villain.

“Call the cops,” he says, pointing to the phone. “Two blocks north of here, a villain is holding people hostage.” The man behind the counter nods quickly and all but rips the phone off the wall, dialing the emergency number into it.

Izuku paces along the front of the counter as the man talks quietly into the receiver, too quietly for Izuku to hear. He sees an aisle of candy, an aisle of chips, an aisle of magazines. One has basic supplies like bottles of windshield washer fluid, duct tape, lighter fluid, and tool sets. Izuku sees the lighter fluid and the matches, thinks of Burning last time. *A fire quirk is so well suited, too*, he thinks. *She wouldn’t have to worry about his spikes acting as armor*.

“U-Um,” the cashier’s voice snaps Izuku out of his thoughts, and he turns to look at him. “They said they’d send someone. T-They’ll be there in twenty minutes.”

“Twenty minutes?” Izuku asks, staring at the man in horror. He doesn’t know how long exactly it took Burning to get there last time, but it was certainly less than *twenty minutes*. He remembers the way the blonde woman was crumpled like a broken toy, the way the man’s blood spread across the ground like an oilslick on water. His mouth is suddenly very dry.

“Thank you,” he hears himself say, distantly. He turns and walks out the door, not really hearing when the cashier shouts after him. He walks, calmer than he feels, through the streets. He doesn’t even hear sirens, not even when he scales the fire escape from last time, not when he stands at the top. He stares, distantly, in the direction of where the villain is.

He hears a scream, and he jumps.

--

There’s already a plan in Izuku’s head when he wakes up. He starts back toward the convenience store, drawing his knife and jogging through the streets. He can’t be nice, can’t play by the rules if he wants to save these people. He isn’t a hero, and he doesn’t have a quirk that can help him fight. All he has is his wits and information.

He pushes open the door to the convenience store with this in mind, knowing that that older man will be scared of him from the beginning. He points the knife at the man and doesn’t bother to shape his expression; he’s wearing a mask after all. He tries not to sound terrified when he says.

“Better call the cops,” he turns and grabs a bottle of the lighter fluid and a box of matches, stuffing the matches into a pouch on his belt and tucking the lighter fluid under one arm. “I’m robbing you.”

The man behind the counter takes a step back, sputtering, but Izuku doesn’t want to stick around. He lowers the knife and turns to face the man again.

“I’m about to set someone on fire, two blocks north of here,” he says through gritted teeth. “Tell the police to hurry. Burning is on patrol, so they should send her as well. She’s used to dealing with fire,” he says, turning and yanking the door open before the man can reply. He can hear the bell above the door ding cheerfully as he sprints out.

He folds his knife shut and shoves it in his pocket as he runs down the streets; he won’t need it for his plan. The trip to the truck and to the fight seems to take longer than normal, and Izuku pushes himself, his calves burning. He needs to start working out more on his own; he should be able to run faster.

He slows to a quick walk when he sees the truck and sneaks around the back, moving his shoes carefully along the ground like he did the second time. He listens, doesn’t hear any screams, just whimpers, and he prays that means nobody is dead yet. He came faster than the first time, even, so they should still be alive.

As he rounds the truck, he sees Porcupine, backlit by his headlights and just as huge as ever. Izuku unscrews the cap on the jug of lighter fluid, a bright red container probably about one pint in volume. It’ll have to be enough. He steps as close as he dares to, then darts forward and dumps the bottle over Porcupine’s hunched back. The air smells like kerosene, sharp and chemical, as the villain shouts in surprise and turns.

Izuku barely dodges the open-palmed strike Porcupine sends at him, and he shoves his hand into his belt pocket, pulling out the box of matches. His hands shake as he rips open the box, backing away from Porcupine, who’s stalking toward him with anger in his eyes.

“Who the hell are you?” he growls, and Izuku strikes a match, the fire a bright golden beacon in the dark night. Izuku sees the fire light dance over Porcupine’s face, showing more of the man’s features than he’s ever gotten to see before. He’s ugly, middle aged and twisted up with such anger that it makes him look nothing but cruel. Izuku grits his teeth and steps towards him with the match.

“I’m the one who’s going to stop you from killing those people,” he says, swiping at Porcupine with the match, the flame flickering as it rushes through the air. Porcupine flinches back, the match just barely missing a damp spine, dripping with yellow-tinted fluid that glitters, reflecting the light of the match.

“I’d like to see you try, brat,” he says, stepping back and throwing a kick at Izuku. Izuku sees it coming and dodges, stepping back neatly. *It’s a lot easier to dodge when you’re not already injured*, he thinks idly.

He realizes that he’s in range of the spines like this, and he slides forward and out of the way just as Porcupine fires three dark spines from his shoulder. Izuku notices, that like the past few times, he doesn’t throw a kick or punch at the same time, even though Izuku is close enough to do it. He wonders if Porcupine even *can* throw a hit while he’s firing.

He swipes the lit match at Porcupine and feels it contact a spine on the back of the man’s arm. Fear flares in the man’s eyes for the first time, and Izuku feels a rush of satisfaction as the man fires the flaming quill in a panic, the fiery thing shooting out into the night. Izuku thinks he might hear sirens, but he doesn’t let it distract him. He steps in, grabbing the man’s forearm while he’s mid-shot and holding the match just above the bare skin of his chest, where he’s glistening with the lighter fluid that drips down his skin. Porcupine freezes like a statue, his pupils tiny specks and his heart beating so hard Izuku can feel his pulse in his arm, even through the gloves Izuku wears.

“Don’t move,” Izuku says, making eye contact with Porcupine even though he knows his goggles hide where he’s looking. “Or I’ll kill you.”

Porcupine just stares at him, his throat bobbing as he swallows. Izuku watches a bead of sweat run down his neck. The flame of the match twitches, and Izuku sees the way Porcupine’s gaze darts over to it. He feels strange, like he’s someone else entirely, but he doesn’t have it in him to care. Two people would be dead by now if he wasn’t doing this. Two innocent people, who don’t get second chances like he does. He tightens his grip on Porcupine’s wrist.

He’s sure, now, that he hears sirens. They’re loud, and he hears quick footsteps too. He doesn’t dare to turn his head, doesn’t dare to look away in case Porcupine tries something, but he hears a voice that he’d only heard screaming before.

“He saved us!” a female voice shouts, and from the corner of his eyes he can see a blur of blonde hair, pointing to him. “The guy with the spikes said he was gonna kill us, but he showed up out of nowhere.”

“Right!” Burning’s voice startles Izuku just a tiny bit, and he darts a quick glance over to see her only about ten feet from where Izuku holds Porcupine. He steps back, quickly moving to put distance between him and the villain.

“H-He’s got lighter fluid on him,” Izuku says, cursing his stutter. “So, i-if he tries anything...” He swallows, watching as the pro hero looks at him and then Porcupine.

“Okay,” she says, and Izuku sees the flash of red and blue police sirens, the shriek of them drowning out what Burning says next, but he supposes it doesn’t really matter. He needs to run.

He drops the match and steps on it, smothering it under his boot, then turns and sprints away, praying that they prioritize the villain over the vigilante. He knows what happens when you do this kind of thing and you're not licensed. They stop you at best, treat you like a villain at worst.

He runs through the night, not for the first time, but it feels different in this situation. The air in his lungs feels like a celebration, and he resists the urge to whoop and cheer as he skips down the streets of Musutafu. Sure, he'd died, but more importantly, those civilians hadn't. As he enters his own neighborhood, the sounds of sirens distant and barely audible behind him, he lets himself slow to a walk. He feels the night breeze brushing against his sweaty skin, and he lets himself smile.

That, he thinks, is why I want to be a hero.

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He isn't even sore the next morning when he opens his eyes sleepily, light spilling through a gap in his curtains and falling on his face. It's a strange feeling, to wake up and have it be in the warmth of his bed instead of on that street. He fumbles a hand on his side table until it finds his phone, which he tugs free of the charging cable and holds in front of his face.

Like usual, he opens his hero news app. He doesn't have any friends to text, so it's always been this and the quirk analysis and pro hero fan forums. The app is simple in theme, and it's usually dominated by articles on All Might and the rest of the top ten, so he's a little surprised to see that the top few articles all seem to be about someone he's never even heard of. The first article, "Boy in Red Saves Four," doesn't ring any bells, neither does the second, "New Hero or New Villain? Masked Fighter Aids in Capture," but it all suddenly makes horrible sense when he reads the third title, "Vigilante Threatens Murder to Attract Heroes, Results in Successful Rescue of Four." Izuku clicks on one of them and reads through it with a sense of sickness building in his stomach.

The thing is, he never thought he'd get recognized as a vigilante. He'd always just assumed that he'd be a famous hero and his nighttime identity would be something only underground heroes and cops knew about, but this? He doesn't remember to breathe for a second as he reads through the descriptions of himself. There's no pictures of him, just of Burning and Porcupine (who actually is apparently known as Impaler. fitting.), but it's still unnerving to read article after article after the suspected college student that robbed a store to save lives. The media seems unsure about his status, if he's a villain getting vengeance or a new vigilante or even a new pro that avoided the limelight, but reading the speculation both eases his nerves and makes him feel sick. They think he's older than he is for one, but they can tell he isn't full grown. They think he has either an analysis quirk or one that would have made him invulnerable to the fire he threatened Porcupine/Impaler with. After all, why else would he risk that? He'd surely have burned up too if he'd lit the villain up at such close range.

The worst part, he thinks, is that so many of them think he's a villain. They cite the way he threatened the shopkeeper with a knife, the way he stole and the way he would have *killed* the villain, not just captured him. They speculate that Izuku wanted to steal the other villain's thunder, that he wanted to make a name for himself. That if he wanted to help, he would have been better off waiting for the pros to arrive.

That makes him feel nauseous with frustration, his eyes pricking with angry tears because they don't *get it*. He didn't make an educated guess and get it right on the first try. He didn't take the risky route for fun. He'd tried everything else, tried getting a hero and tried calling the cops and tried to handle it with knives and not stolen flames.

He *knows* he saved four people, and the majority of the articles agree, calling him a vigilante and not a villain, but it still makes his heart ache to see those few that insist on him being evil, being

dangerous. It makes him want to curl up in a corner and die, makes him want to throw himself off of a building so his skull gets crushed into pieces on the sidewalk below.

He settles for scratching at his arm as he reads, using the raw sensation of nails on skin to ground himself as he reads. He knows he should set his phone down or do something else, but it's a sick fascination that keeps him reading.

He thinks that next time, he'll do better. He'll save people and do it in a way that doesn't leave people wondering; they'll *know* , without a shred of a doubt, that he's a force for good.

Chapter End Notes

cw: gratuitous violence and gore, minor self injury (izuku scratches his arms while stressed to ground himself)

i hope u enjoyed!!! next chapter may not be out tomorrow since a once daily update schedule is difficult with 4k+ word chapters, but it should be out within the next week. i know it doesn't seem like it, but we're close to the entrance exam which im really excited for

foresight

Chapter Summary

last time: izuku defeated the porcupine villain and saw himself in the news

Chapter Notes

me: it'll be longer before next chapter

also me: *writes a 6k word chapter in one day and posts it*

in my defense, school technically doesn't start for another three days

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Izuku hopes it doesn't look suspicious when he goes back to the store he bought the knives from the day after he beats Porcupine, with the articles all talking about him and describing him. He knows, rationally, that he looks nothing like his vigilante self, but knowing that doesn't stop him from feeling anxious as he slips into the shop in the early afternoon, the sun bright and high in the sky.

The same lady from last time is behind the counter, and he greets her with a shy wave when he walks in. She smiles brightly at him, pushing her glasses up on her nose and standing up from her stool.

"Hey, how are those knives working for you?" She asks, straightening her apron and walking out from behind the glass counter.

"T-They're great," Izuku answers, then wonders if that's a weird thing to say. Should he have said he hadn't gotten to use them yet?

"Great!" The girl replies, flashing him a double thumbs up and a smile so wide it crinkles her eyes shut. "I'm Sumire Miura, by the way."

"N-nice to meet you," Izuku replies, blinking. "Izuku M-Midoriya..."

"Nice to meet you too, Midoriya!" Miura puts her hands on her hips and gives him an appraising look. "Now, what can I help you with today?"

Izuku swallows. "I need s-something loud. In case I'm in trouble and n-need to get people's attention fast." He picks at his cuticle as he talks, hoping it wouldn't raise any red flags for him to be asking about this. He doesn't want to get caught so early in his career as a vigilante, although he supposes he could kill himself and re-do this conversation if it goes poorly.

"Hmm," Miura tilts her head, thinking. "I bet you want something *really* loud, right? The best thing we have for that is air horns, I think." She turns, walking along the aisles, and Izuku scrambles to follow her. She leads him right past the knife aisle, stopping at an aisle filled with various cans of

sprayable stuff. He sees spray paints, canned air, wheel lubricant... a lot of things, even some with labels in other languages. He wonders, not for the first time, who exactly the target audience of this store is. Teenage vigilantes, apparently.

He's distracted from his thoughts by Miura holding out a white can with a red horn attached to the top. "Here!" She says, gesturing at a few other air horns on the shelf with her free hand. "We've only got the one brand, but I imagine they all work the same."

"T-Thank you," Izuku squeaks out, taking the offered air horn. *It matches my costume colors*, he thinks distantly, then looks up at Miura.

"Anything else?" She asks, and Izuku can't help but glance at her wrist, trying to see if the bruise is still there or if there are new ones. He can't see anything under her long sleeved shirt, though.

"Um, no," he says, smiling. "J-Just this!"

His mom scolds him later when he tests the air horn in his room, but it's worth it if it means he can get heroes to a scene more quickly.

--

It's a cool Tuesday morning the week before the written portion of the entrance exam, and Izuku's in his room reading the news. The stories about him have died down, mostly, with only a couple of articles mentioning that he'd been spotted around town. He's been more reluctant to go out as well, which has probably helped with getting him off of the media's radar, so to speak. The time he'd normally have been out on the streets had been spent sleeping or studying these past few days, and he's feeling much more confident for it. *It's amazing how much easier it is to study when I'm not up all night*, he thinks, laughing a little to himself.

The trending news topic, though, makes his mood drop quicker than he thought possible. "Seven Year Old Girl Kidnapped Outside Family Home," it reads. When he opens the article, he sees pictures, too and that's the worst part of it. The girl is tiny, so small he wouldn't have guessed she could be old enough to have a quirk, much less *seven years old*.

The picture at the top of the article is just a school photo of her, a shy looking kid with messy brown hair that's cut in a bob just below her jaw. She has giant blue eyes and tanned skin, a tiny scar (or is it a freckle?) under her nose. Her smile takes up most of her face, and Izuku tries to remember that as he scrolls through the next couple of paragraphs to look at the next image.

It's grainy, clearly a cell phone picture, but it shows that same girl wearing bright blue pajamas. Izuku can't see her face, but her arm is gripped at the wrist, held above her head by a man who looks to be in his twenties, with pale green, shoulder-length hair pulled away from his face. He's got a mask covering any of his features, the latex, skin tight kind you have to glue on, but Izuku can see the grimace on his face and the reflection of the camera flash in his eyes. He's got one hand outstretched, pointing to the right of wherever the person taking the picture was, and there's a halo of white light emanating from his palm.

Izuku looks through the article and finds that the man is apparently a known criminal, a notorious kidnapper and robber with a teleportation quirk that works by making pairs of temporary portals. He's wearing a suit in the picture, a well-filled black suit that shows a red tie at his chest, and the article confirms he's thought to be a part of an organized crime syndicate. Frustratingly, if the authorities know anything about his group or their plans, they haven't told the media.

The article also notes the girl's quirk, and the comment section below speculates that she must

have been abducted for another reason since it's not something desirable enough to get her kidnapped for that alone. She has a mild empathy quirk, one that lets her sense the emotions of people she's in physical contact with. Reading it makes Izuku wince because she'd *definitely* have felt whatever her abductor was feeling when he took her, evading the police until he disappeared, according to the article. He hopes, stupidly, that she'd get rescued soon, then remembers what he's *just* read-- they don't know her abductor's name, base of operations, or affiliation. They don't know anything.

And then it occurs to him, the realization sinking into his bones like ice water dumped over his head. The article doesn't say the address she was taken from or the route the villain took, but it *does* show the picture, and Izuku recognizes that spot. It's not part of his usual route for patrol, but it's on his way home. It's close, close enough that *maybe*, maybe if he killed himself and got lucky enough to reset to the night before, he might be able to save her. He might be able to get information, at the very least. Might be able to help.

He sets his phone down and gets out of bed like normal. Tugs on a pair of sweatpants over his boxers. Runs a hand through his hair. Walks to the bathroom and stares at his face in the mirror.

How do I want to do this? The thing about jumping off of buildings is that it's very convenient when he's already outside and not so much when he's at home. He could just go for a walk, he supposes. His mom's at work, so she won't notice anything either way.

He thinks that maybe, he needs to come up with a plan for how to quickly kill himself if he needs to reset himself. A backup plan, in a variety of circumstances. The thought pings a memory in the back of his head, when he'd read online that having a plan was a bad sign as far as being suicidal goes. He pushes the thought away. It doesn't count, right? It's not like he's actually killing himself, not like it actually hurts him.

He steps back into his room and kneels by his bed, pulling out the box he keeps his costume and vigilante gear in. His knees dig into the floor as he rifles through the box, pulling his utility belt out from where it rests at the very bottom. It looks odd in the morning light, brighter than it should. Izuku realizes that he only ever really sees it in dim light, normally. He pulls out the folding knife, knowing that the blade is still wicked sharp where it sits tucked into the handle. He can even see a hint of silver through gaps in the handle, and he holds it in his palm as he straightens up, nudging the box back under his bed with his foot. He feels the heat from his hand slowly warming the handle of the knife, and he walks back into the bathroom slower than he normally would. He turns on the hot water for the bathtub and reaches his free hand to plug the drain. The sound of the water is loud in his ears as he uses his bare foot to drop the lid of the toilet, then sits on the lid and watches the tub slowly fill. If he's going to do this, he might as well enjoy it.

It's just practice, he justifies to himself, the thoughts seeming hollow even to him. *Tall buildings won't always be an option. I should be able to do it this way, too*. He doesn't let himself consider the way a shiver runs up his spine when he thinks about that blade, wicked sharp and smooth and clean, digging into the soft flesh of his forearms. He doesn't let himself think too hard about the fact that he's dreamed about doing this, whispers of bloody bathtubs and sharp blades bouncing around in his dreams. Not nightmares, even. Izuku wonders what it says about him that he's been looking forward to trying this, a little.

Well, he thinks. *Most people don't get to do this without it killing them. It's only natural that I'm curious*. He sets the knife down carefully on the edge of the tub, then pulls off his clothes, shivering at the air on his bare skin. When he steps one foot in the tub, it's a little too hot, but he ignores it, reaching to turn off the tap instead. He lowers himself into the water, hissing at the sting of it. He can see his skin turning red, just a little. It's not burning him, not scalding him, just

uncomfortable for a moment before he adjusts. When he does adjust, though, leaning back and resting his head on the tile behind him, the water lapping up around his ears, it feels nice. He feels his muscles relax at the heat, muscles he hadn't had just a few months ago. It's nice to see his progress, laid out in front of him.

Izuku figures there's no sense in delaying. He might lose his nerve if he waits, as stupid as that is. *It's just a little pain* . It won't kill him. When it's over, he won't even have a scar.

He flicks the knife open, the clicking sound it makes echoing in the bathroom, mingling with the soft noises of the water rippling in the tub. The blade reflects light off of it, onto the water, and the water reflects it back up to the blade, making a mesmerizing pattern of silvery ripples. He watches it, for a moment, then twists the knife so it reflects the green of his eyes instead. He sees the glint of emerald, the dark smear that must be his eyelashes. He blinks. He stretches his left arm out in front of him, resting so the belly of his arm is just above the water and the back of it is just touching the surface. The heat rises in the form of steam around it. Izuku rests the blade of the knife on his arm, just below the crease where his wrist meets his hand, along the blue-green veins that show through the skin there.

The metal is cool, and when he digs it into his skin, pulling down and *pressing* , he can't help but hiss in pain. The line he cuts in his forearm, deep and vertical and clean, fills quickly with blood, rivulets of it rolling off of his forearm and into the water, turning it a rusty red. It doesn't hurt like getting impaled does, like getting explosions set off on your skin or getting kicked in the gut does, but it still makes Izuku a little light headed. He knows better than to wait, though, and he transfers the blade to his injured hand and repeats the motion on his right arm. This line is less even, less neat, but he manages to get deeper (probably because he's shaking). He must have hit something important, because where the blood ran smoothly out of his left arm, it pulses out of his one in a thick, gushing stream. Izuku drops the knife, not entirely on purpose, and it sinks harmlessly through the water to land on his stomach.

He tries to pick it back up, but his arms won't listen to the command, and he just sighs, leaning back in the water and letting his arms sink under the now dark surface. He doesn't feel cold like he did last time he bled out, just warm and hazy and calm. It's intoxicating, like the burn of his muscles after a workout, that feeling of peace and exhaustion that soaks into his bones. He lets his eyes slide shut, and he thinks *this isn't such a bad way to die after all* .

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He wakes up in his bed, and his first thought is that he didn't reset back far enough. He sits up, biting his lip in frustration, then blinks in the darkness and realizes it's not morning. His phone is on his nightstand, and when he grabs it to check the time, the alarm he has set for his patrol goes off, buzzing in his hand. He shuts it off quickly, and takes a deep breath. He knows what he has to do.

He tugs out that same box from under his bed and starts getting into costume as fast as he can. He curses his need for hair dye when it comes to that step, when he's slicking the black gel into his green hair and pulling it back into his ponytail. His hair's gotten longer since he started this, and it's easier to pull back. He wipes his hands off with tissue and pulls the gloves on, ignoring the nasty stickiness still on his palms. He can wash his hands after he's saved that girl's life.

He's still putting on his utility belt when he hops out the window, breaking into a sprint without bothering to shut it behind him. He doesn't know the exact time the villain was seen, and he doesn't want to waste any time. His quirk thus far has been predictable in that it'll send him back to the same place, over and over again, until he's well past what's been killing him. He still has no

idea how it picks *when* to send him back to initially, but he has started to suspect it has to do with the point in time he registers mentally as “safe.” *There’ll be time for analysis later*, he thinks, skidding around the corner and biting his lip under his mask.

He sees the villain just like in the papers, except the image isn’t grainy and the villain isn’t still. He whips his head around upon hearing Izuku slide around the corner and his mask doesn’t hide the grimace on his face. He’s clutching the kidnapped girl who looks *terrified*, her face pained and eyes wide with horror. The villain holds up a glowing hand, and the ground falls out from under Izuku’s feet.

Izuku blinks, disoriented as he pops out of a glowing white portal, shooting feet first out of the side of a building about 100 feet from where he’d been. The villain is running up ahead, and Izuku curses mentally as he hops to his feet and starts to run after him. He watches the villain’s hands, sees the way they clearly take time to charge up. The light that’s gathering around his palms is dim, but quickly growing, and Izuku’s catching up to him now. The girl he’s dragging behind him is slowing him down.

Izuku realizes that the villain is running strangely, headed straight towards a brick wall and not along the road like would make sense, and it clicks as Izuku watches the villain lift *both* hands. He points his right palm at the wall and a shimmering membrane of light flickers, swirling multicolored on the wall. Without slowing down, he twists and angles his other hand, a similar looking portal manifesting on a building wall much further down the street. Izuku hisses in frustration as the villain steps into one portal and out the other one. He’s behind now, the gap he’d been closing now wider than before, and it makes a lot of sense that nobody could catch this guy. This environment is perfect for him, with walls and buildings everywhere for him to throw his quirk at and propel himself forward. *He was selected for this*, Izuku thinks. *Because he’s perfectly suited to make this work*.

Izuku realizes that this means that he has very, very little chance of succeeding first try, but he’s going to try. He takes off toward the villain and the girl again, pulling out his air horn and holding one gloved finger over the button. He waits, watches as the villain’s palms glow bright and brighter, but Izuku doesn’t press the button until the villain raises his hands up to shoot.

The air horn is loud, as loud as Izuku hoped, and even though he’s still a bit behind the villain, it makes him flinch just as his quirk fires. One of the portals hits the ground next to the villain, and the other seems to hit the metal scaffolding on a half-way constructed building, fizzling out and disappearing into nothingness. The portal on the ground flickers out and dies like a lightbulb that’s run out of power, and Izuku feels himself grinning under his mask because that means that the villain needs an even surface, *two* even surfaces for his quirk to work.

Izuku keeps running at the villain and the girl, even when the villain stops trying to get away and whips around to face Izuku instead. Izuku drops the air horn, fumbling with his belt and pulling out the knife he used to kill himself. Maybe it’s that thought that distracts him, makes him miss the moment the green-haired villain pulls out a pistol, but Izuku only registers the weapon when it’s pointed at him. The villain doesn’t hesitate, and Izuku is still running when he cocks the gun and shoots.

The bullet hits Izuku in the neck, and it only burns for a second before he hits the ground, dead.

--

When Izuku wakes up for his next try, he formulates a plan while he puts on his costume, moving through the motions on muscle memory alone. He knows that to counteract a quirk like the villain’s, he’ll need to get the other man into an open space, somewhere he can’t reasonably use his

quirk to escape. He also knows that the villain is armed, likely with more than just the one gun at that. Izuku also, thankfully, knows the direction he's going and when he'll be at each spot, at least for the brief distance he was in pursuit of the villain.

It's also telling that he didn't try to take the girl hostage, Izuku thinks, and he wonders if that was just the villain's style or if he thought Izuku wouldn't care. Izuku doesn't know, but he thinks the villain would have, if he was ever going to. Maybe.

Izuku really should get a burner phone. He tugs on his gloves and snaps on his utility belt as he thinks about it, about how if he could anonymously contact the pros about this, he could get them this information perhaps even quicker than he will on foot. It's not something that'll help him right now, though, and Izuku hops out the window and takes off running, this time headed slightly more east than last time. He doesn't want to catch the villain behind, because then he'll just be chasing after him. No, he wants to force the villain to change direction, to get off course. And Izuku thinks he knows just how to do that.

It's also convenient that this route takes him right past the store he'd robbed to help defeat Porcupine. Izuku doesn't even bother going inside, just runs up to the glass door and bangs on it, squinting at the light, a stark contrast to the dim evening. He sees the shopkeeper, the same one as last time, pale from when he stands behind the counter, and Izuku holds his thumb and pinky to his ear in the universal sign for a phone call. The man doesn't seem to have any reservations; he picks up the phone. Izuku doesn't wait around to watch, instead taking off back down the road. Hopefully, knowing to expect him will help avoid him getting shot by cops.

Izuku feels his mask move with his breath as he runs, the cool air of the night doing nothing to stop him from sweating as he runs across the streets. There's a couple of people out, even though it's so late, and he sees people stop and stare at him as he races through the city.

He stops at a street corner that he knows is in the villain's path, and he draws his knives, positioning himself in the northeast corner of the intersection, hopefully to block the villain from going either of those directions. If Izuku's hunch is right, the villain will prioritize losing his tail than taking the fastest possible route. He'll be willing to turn south instead of continuing to run eastward, and that's how Izuku will get him. Just south of this intersection is a large parking lot, rimmed on all sides with hedges and not walls, hopefully not smooth enough for the villain's quirk to work. If Izuku follows him, blocks the way he came from, he should be able to catch up before the villain gets out of the area. Izuku just has to hope that the heroes and pros that are surely on the villain's trail get there before the villain can get very far.

He hears the villain before he sees him, and Izuku watches him step out of a portal, still dragging that poor kid with him. She seems to be resisting, which is different from last time, but then again Izuku had seen her earlier on last time. She's digging her heels into the ground despite only having on socks, and Izuku bites his lip in sympathy as he sees the villain tug at her sharply, dragging her across the rough ground. He can't help but be glad, though. This will make things easier for him.

"Hey, portals!" Izuku shouts, and the villain's head whips around to look at him, his green hair coming loose in thin mint-colored strands. "What, surprised to see someone here?" Izuku takes a step forward, swipes at the air with his pocket knife and raises his left fist with his punching knife, prepared to throw a hit if he needs to.

"Who are you?" The villain asks, pulling the girl behind him-- and oh, that's strange. Is he under orders to keep her *alive*? It makes sense, considering he abducted her and didn't *murder* her.

"Why don't you come over here and find out?" He says, trying to channel his inner Kacchan, but mentally crossing his fingers that this bluff will pan out. The villain glances over him, like he's

sizing him up, his hazel eyes flashing in the darkness, and sure enough, he turns and fires a portal on the nearest wall and another down the road, on a building to the south. Izuku grins, knowing it's impossible to see with his mask and goggles, and starts to run after them.

Right when he steps into the parking lot, he hears sirens and he thinks *yes!* because it means he just needs to delay the villain long enough for the authorities to get here. The villain stops about twenty feet into the parking lot and whips around to face Izuku, his face twisted in frustration.

“How the hell did you know where I was?!” He demands, once again shoving the girl behind him. She pulls back against his grip on her arm, and without even looking down at her he knees her in the stomach, sending her spluttering. She drops like a sack of brick, the villain's arm the only thing holding her up. Izuku clenches his jaw and takes a step forward. The parking lot is mostly deserted, all empty, flat asphalt. The only cars are in the other end of it, close to a building that still has lights on. The streetlights that illuminate the area spill pools of yellow light onto the black ground.

“Same way I know how your quirk works,” Izuku says, and then takes a gamble. “And how I know who you work for.” Izuku watches the man's eyes widen, stretching his mask, as he steps back in clear fear. Izuku is just glad the man didn't question the claim, that he believed such a bold lie.

The villain reaches for his belt, but this time Izuku knows what to expect. He runs forward and just like he's seen in self defense videos, he strikes the underside of the man's wrist with the back of his hand before the man can get the gun all the way up. It's a risky move, but as the gun clatters to the ground without firing, skidding across the asphalt and stopping a good ways away, Izuku's glad he's read up on how guns work. There's no way the villain would be running around with a gun that was both loaded and had the safety off, not if he didn't want to get his own foot shot by mistake.

“Fuck!” The villain swears, and Izuku sees him point both hands at the ground. Izuku slides to the side, reaching for the air horn on his belt and presses the button without even taking it off his belt. Like last time, it startles the villain, but that wasn't what Izuku was going for, anyway. The sounds of sirens, shrill and anxious in the night, have gotten closer, but Izuku figures the pros tend to be a few moments ahead of the cops in situations like these. Hopefully, close enough to hear the air horn if not the sounds of the fight.

Izuku winces as the villain throws a neat kick at him, and he just barely blocks it with a raised arm. He stumbles a step back though, and he realizes with horror that he's stepped into a portal. He curses mentally as he feels himself falling one way, then reversing directions and landing on his head on the ground just as the portal dissipates from where it was. The ground is hard and unyielding, and even though Izuku doesn't think the total distance he fell could be more than his height, it still knocks him hard enough for his head to spin. He tries to ignore it as he gets to his feet, shaking his head to dispel the fuzzy sensation at the edges of his senses.

The villain hasn't gotten far, thankfully, and Izuku charges after him, knives still in hand. He slashes quickly, then throws a punch that barely grazes the villain, just swishing harmlessly through his suit jacket. The slash, though cuts right through, red leaking from the villain's shoulder and staining his white undershirt quickly. Izuku moves in for another hit, but the villain is expecting it, apparently. He gets Izuku in the jaw with a well timed elbow, and it sends Izuku right back to the ground. He blinks, stars swirling in his vision, then whips his head over to the villain just in time to see the man raise his hands, one pointed under Izuku and another on the ground, further away from the villain and the girl still half-collapsed behind him. Izuku braces himself, then blinks in surprise as the light on the villain's palm disappears suddenly.

The villain's face mirror's Izuku's own shock, and Izuku turns to look behind himself, at the entrance to the parking lot. He sees the swirling cloth first, then the golden goggles, the black hair floating in midair as if it was underwater. Izuku feels a wave of relief. *Eraserhead is here.*

"Step away from the kid," Eraserhead says, his capture weapon coming out to surround the green eyed villain, who takes a step back, his eyes wide with fear. He glances behind him, at the girl, and drops her wrist. She shoots up, running away from the villain and at Izuku, her blue pajamas torn and filthy. She all but throws herself at Izuku, and Izuku drops the knives and raises his hands to catch her and she launches herself at him where he sits on the ground.

Izuku holds her tight when he hears soft sobs, and, remembering her quirk, he tries to think as hard as he can that *it's going to be okay*, and that *you're safe now, I've got you*. He can't tell if he works, but he looks up and watches as Eraserhead's capture weapon wraps itself around the villain. The scarf catches the light of the street lamps in a way that makes Izuku dizzy and *oh*, he realizes, *I have a head injury*. He blinks, trying to dispel the queasiness that he suddenly feels. He hears the sounds of tires scraping the ground and looks behind him to see a police motorcycle pulling into the parking lot and stopping about ten feet away.

The cop hops off of his bike and tugs off his helmet, dropping it to the ground and then jogging over to where Eraserhead is standing by the villain. The officer holds up a pair of quirk-suppressing handcuffs and says something to Eraserhead that Izuku can't understand. Eraserhead nods, watching as the police officer snaps the handcuffs on the green haired villain, then retracting his capture weapon and wrapping it back around his neck. Eraser turns to look at Izuku where he and the kid are sitting, with Izuku's butt on the ground and the girl on top of his legs, his hands resting on her back. Izuku tightens his grip on her, even though he knows Eraserhead is here to help her. He can't help the fear that runs through him, considering Eraserhead is likely the only person who could kill him for real without using drugs or handcuffs.

"You again," Eraserhead says, walking up to them and standing, looking down at Izuku through his goggles. They're close enough that Izuku can see the man's eyes through the gold bars, which is why he sees the exact moment his irises shift to a crimson red, even before his hair starts to lift. Izuku flinches, hard, and he squeezes his eyes shut like that'll stop it if Eraser tries to hurt him.

"Relax," Eraserhead sighs, and Izuku doesn't quite obey, but he does open his eyes. "I'm not going to arrest you for saving her life," he says, gesturing to the girl still shaking in Izuku's arms. "I do need you to help me take her back to the police station, though, seeing as she seems to like you."

"S-Saved me," the girl whispers, into his collarbone, and from the way Eraserhead tilts his head, Izuku knows he hears it too. "H-He saved me."

Eraserhead sighs, and offers a hand. "Look. As much as you're technically a criminal yourself, I don't particularly feel like arresting you right now. We'll go back to the station, you'll answer a few questions about him," Eraser jerks his other hand back, pointing a thumb at where the villain is being loaded into a police car. "and you can be on your way."

Izuku hesitates, then nods, hating the way his surroundings get fuzzy when he does that. He wonders, briefly, if this is a bad idea, then takes the hand Eraserhead is offering him.

--

The ride back to the station is quiet, and Shouta has to keep glancing into the rearview mirror to be sure that the vigilante and the girl he'd rescued were still there. It's impossible to get a read on the boy, with his reflective goggles and black mask covering everything except his eyebrows and thin strip of skin under his eyes, but Shouta can tell he's looking out the window as they drive from the

way his head is facing.

There's a dark bruise on the kid's jaw, a red splotch that stretches under his mask and looks to have started swelling already. That, combined with the unsteady movements and the lack of a fight, make Shouta suspect that the vigilante's got a concussion at the very least. He'd only gotten there right at the end of the fight, so there could be many more injuries that he doesn't know about. He'll have to try and talk the kid into at least getting checked out by medical staff, but something tells him it won't work.

He's also starting to seriously doubt the age estimate the police had for him. The guy was short and skinny, but that alone could mean anything. The thing that gets Shouta is the way the kid's face is clearly still soft with baby fat, the way he talks like he's not used to seeing heroes up close. Shouta thinks he's a high schooler at the *oldest*, and the thought makes his head hurt.

When the police car pulls to a stop in front of the station, the victim's parents are already waiting outside, two women in their early forties clutching each other tight. They run at the car as soon as they spot their daughter, and the girl herself is opening the door and running into their arms before the officer that had been waiting with her parents can open the door for her. She'd still need a full medical evaluation, but from what Shouta heard on the scene, she'd be okay to go home after the report was filed.

Shouta sighs. Time for his job. He glances at the officer who'd driven them here and nods at him. The young officer gives him a smile in return and slips out of the car, leaving Shouta and the teenage vigilante alone.

"Hey," Shouta says, "You awake?"

The kid turns to face him, and Shouta can tell he's exhausted even with the disguise on. "Y-Yeah," he answers, barely a whisper.

"If we take you into the police station proper, we're legally required to arrest you," Shouta explains. "So I'm going to ask you a few questions in the car, then I'll drive you to a hospital."

"I d-don't need a hospital," the kid replies, tugging at the collar of his long sleeved shirt where it sticks out above his hoodie.

"You have a concussion," Shouta says, then continues without missing a beat. "What's your name?"

"U-Um, I'm not going to--"

"Your vigilante name." Shouta cuts him off, resisting the urge to smile.

"Oh," the kid seems dumbfounded, oddly enough. "...you can call me Ace," he replies eventually, voice still quiet but not stuttering, at least.

Shouta nods. "How did you know about the ongoing abduction?" Ace stares at him for a moment. At least, that's what Shouta's assuming is going on under the goggles.

"It's part of my q-quirk," he replies, shifting in his seat. He's still wearing his seatbelt, and his red hoodie stands out against the black upholstery.

"Which is?" Shouta asks, because having more information on vigilantes is never a bad idea. They never seem to stay vigilantes for long, either getting caught or going rogue.

“...Foresight.” Ace’s head tilts down, and Shouta thinks he’s staring at his lap. Interesting. It’s not analysis like some had been speculating.

“I see,” Shouta replies. “Do you have any information on the villain?”

“Um, he has a portal quirk,” the kid says, “but I’m sure you a-already knew that. He didn’t w-want the girl to get hurt, s-so his orders were probably to keep her alive, but he didn’t--” Ace clears his throat. “He *wouldn’t* hesitate to shoot me, if he got the chance, so, um, the girl was what was important, n-not just having no casualties. He also seemed afraid w-when I told him I knew who he works for.”

Shouta arches an eyebrow at that. “Do you?”

Ace shakes his head, then winces, holding a hand to his swollen jaw. “No! I-I just bluffed, and I g-guess he bought it?”

“I see,” Shouta answers. “Well, is there anything else you know?”

“No...” the kid replies, seeming almost upset that he doesn’t.

“I can drive you to the hospital,” Shouta offers, but he knows even before Ace reaches down and clicks the seat belt release button that the answer will be no.

“I-I’m okay, thank you!” Ace says, fumbling with the door knob, then pushing the door open. “Um. F-For not arresting me.”

Shouta sighs, shaking his head as Ace steps out of the car and starts to *run* away, like he thought Shouta would change his mind at that point. He hopes that he gets his head checked out.

He has a feeling he’ll be seeing a lot more of him.

Chapter End Notes

cw: more graphic than usual suicide by wrist slitting, kidnapping

i hope you enjoyed!!!! im sorry it takes me so long to reply to comments, im really shy whoops. im excited to get into the meat of the story, which sounds silly to say when we're already 25k words into the fic, but trust me we'll get to UA and all that jazz in time!!

entrance exam

Chapter Summary

last time: izuku did a rescue and got a vigilante name

Chapter Notes

i apologize in advance i feel like this is a mess

also! i realized that in canon they don't graduate middle school until after they get the results, but i already wrote the last day in this fic... whoops! sorry about that mistake, it shouldn't do too much to affect the story long term though

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

When Izuku wakes up the next morning, it's to his mom's hands gently shaking his shoulder. He cracks one eye open, confused to see her hovering over him, worried. *Doesn't she have work?*

"Izuku?" She says softly, and she sounds so *worried*. Izuku sits up at that, only to immediately regret it as his bedroom starts to spin and twist around him. He's overwhelmed with a wave of nausea, and the only warning he manages to give his mom is a choking noise before he's leaning over the side of his bed and throwing up on the floor. Thankfully, it's mostly water and his mom manages to jump back up in time, but it still leaves his throat feeling raw and his head pounding. Well. His head had kind of been pounding since last night, since he came back from the police station and collapsed into bed without even bothering to change.

... Wait. Izuku glances down at himself, and his mouth drops open in horror when he realizes that, yup, he's still in his costume, maroon hoodie and skin tight black shirt and all. At least he had the presence of mind to take off the utility belt full of knives before throwing himself into bed, and he can see it along with his goggles and mask laid out neatly on his desk which.... He definitely had not done last night. He doesn't really remember, to be honest, but he's pretty sure he just threw them on the floor.

"Izuku," his mom tries again, and when he looks up at her, her smile is strained.

"M-Mom," he says, and *ow* his jaw hurts. He reaches a hand up and feels the swollen, hot bruise.

"What happened, baby?" She asks, her voice cracking, and Izuku swallows because his mom is many things but stupid is not one of them. He's not going to get away with brushing this off, not when...

"Mom," he says, reaching back to run a hand through his hair and grimacing when he can feel the dye still in it. "Um. Have you been watching the news lately?"

She nods, then sighs, reaching up her hand to pinch the bridge of her nose. Her brow twitches.

“Izuku. Are you implying,” she takes a deep breath, “that *you’re* Ace?”

Izuku is confused for just a second, then remembers the name he gave to Eraserhead last night. “Um. Maybe?” He hopes his mom will think it’s a joke, even though there’s like zero chance of that happening.

“Izuku!” She says, wrapping her arms around him so suddenly it jostles his sore jaw, but he just hugs her back, surprised. “God, you could have *died* and I wouldn’t have even known where you were!”

That’s what she’s mad about? He thinks distantly. He can’t die, but... She doesn’t know that.

“I’m sorry, mom.” He says instead of protesting, sinking into her hug and shutting his eyes. He doesn’t know why exactly his eyes are wet with tears, but some part of him recognizes how inevitable this was. He lives with her, lives *alone* with his mom who he’s so so close to. How could she not find out?

He buries his face in her shoulder, ignoring the pain it sends shooting through his jaw and up into his temples. “I didn’t want to worry you,” he says, voice muffled by her sweater. He knows he’s getting hair dye and tears and probably even vomit all over her, but he can’t bring himself to care.

“Oh, Izuku,” she says. “You can tell me anything or nothing and I’m still going to worry. That’s my job.” She squeezes him. “But I’d rather you tell me about stuff like this.” Izuku hears a snuffle in her voice. “I was so scared when I came in to check on you and saw that horrible bruise on your face.”

Izuku nods into her shirt. “I’m sorry,” he whispers.

“It’s okay, baby,” she replies.

She stays home from work that day, brings him soup and helps him wash the dye out of his hair. He manages to talk her out of going to the doctor for his obvious concussion, but he can’t do anything to stop her from keeping him in bed, bringing him his notes and reading them out to him so he won’t have to read and strain his eyes but can still study. She helps him put on clean, soft pajamas and washes his costume carefully, folding it and setting it on top of his dresser when it’s dry.

He finds himself regretting having hidden it from her at all.

--

The next time he goes on patrol, it’s almost a week later. His mom hadn’t wanted him going out until his concussion was fully healed, but she relented when his head stopped aching and he stopped getting dizzy when standing up. She’d given him a little first aid kit to attach to his utility belt, too, which was nice. Izuku can’t imagine using it on himself, but it’ll be nice to have if he has to rescue someone.

This patrol is different from the others because people keep stopping and calling out to him. The first time it happens, he’s just walking along the sidewalk, hands in his hoodie pockets, enjoying the cool night breeze on his face, when he hears a voice call out to him.

“Hey, is that Ace?” Izuku turns to look and sees a scruffy looking man with a yellow beanie on. “Dude, I saw you on the news. You’re totally awesome!” He punches the air with a fist. “You totally saved that little kid!”

Izuku feels his face heat up, and he splutters for a moment before choking out, “T-Thank you!” His voice comes out as a squeak, and the man chuckles, grinning.

“I knew they said you were a kid but it’s hard to believe! Have a nice night, Ace!” He waves, turning and continuing to walk down the sidewalk like he had been before. Izuku stares after him.

After that, he’s a little less surprised when he hears people whispering his vigilante name and calling out to him in admiration. He guesses that despite no media being there when he fought the portal dude, his description in online articles got around well enough that people recognized him. At least some of the attention had to be because this area is where he was known to patrol, of course; it’s a local story. He doesn’t think it’s likely people would recognize him in another city or even another part of Musutafu.

He’s crossing the street when he sees a girl across the street that lights up like it’s Christmas when she sees him. He grits his teeth and finishes crossing the street; he can’t stop traffic, even if there aren’t many cars to stop in the first place. Thankfully, she doesn’t seem interested in asking him a bunch of questions or taking pictures of him (that was the worst; he didn’t want some random phone picture to end up outing him). Instead, she held out a small piece of paper to him.

“Um, hi, I don’t know if you remember me?” She’s blushing. “But you saved me a couple months ago and I, um, could I have your autograph?”

Izuku blinks in surprise, because he recognizes her. She was that girl from so many nights ago, the one with the biting quirk who’d been attacked by three guys in an alleyway. That was the night he’d met Eraserhead for the first time. It’s surreal, seeing someone he’d saved again, smiling and safe instead of terrified with someone else’s blood on her mouth. *She’s probably older than me*, Izuku notes faintly as he nods, taking the piece of paper. It’s a sheet of notebook paper.

“Um, who should I make it out to?” He asks, sheepishly. “I remember you, but I never got a name...”

“Oh!” She smiles. “Um, just Hina is fine!”

“Do you have a pen?” Izuku asks, suddenly realizing he has nothing to sign it with. He can feel his face burning with embarrassment, and he hopes it doesn’t show from under his mask.

“Y-Yes!” she says, reaching into her bag, a bright yellow tote, and pulling one out. She holds it out to him, and when he takes it, their fingers brush and she turns bright red.

“Sorry, I know this is embarrassing, you’re just like, my favorite hero,” she says, tugging on her hair while Izuku signs his vigilante name. “I mean, I know you’re not *technically* a hero, but you’re so cool! And you don’t have a combat quirk either so it’s even more impressive! And you were the only one who came and helped me, so... you’re my favorite!”

Izuku passes the pen and the note back to her, flushing bright red. “T-Thank you, Hina” he says, giving her a slight bow. “I have to, um.” He waves a hand in the general direction he’d been going.

“Of course!” She jumps out of the way. “Good luck, Ace!”

He nods to her and, after a moment, gives her a thumbs up, then starts walking along the street. He manages to keep it together long enough to duck into an alleyway, where he has to sit on the ground and bury his burning hot face in his hands. He has fans. He has fans who are cute girls. He has *fans* who are *cute girls* and want his *autograph* because he’s their *favorite hero*.

He thinks he’s going to die from being too flustered.

--

“Izuku?” his mom asks one night while chopping carrots, her knife moving rhythmically.

“Yeah?” He replies, looking up from his notebook where he was finishing his revised analysis page on Eraserhead.

“Why Ace? I’ve been wondering why you picked that name,” She asks, picking up the cutting board and using the knife to dump the sliced carrots into a pot of bubbling soup.

“Oh,” Izuku replies, shrugging. “That was kind of a spur of the moment decision, really. Eraserhead asked for my vigilante name, and I didn’t have one yet, so...”

“Is Eraserhead the one who can cancel quirks?” His mom asks, turning to look at him, leaning on the counter.

“Yeah!” Izuku says, smiling. “He’s really cool. Honestly, I was going to say Deku at first, just because it’s the only nickname I’ve had?” He sees his mom’s mouth twitch, and he knows she doesn’t like that his only nickname is an insult. “But then I thought that it kind of sounded like the English word for a deck of cards, you know? And the winning card is an Ace, and cards are black and red like my costume, so...”

His mom smiles, then shakes her head. “That’s genius, Izuku, really. Here I’d thought it must have been the name of some hero I hadn’t heard of!”

Izuku feels his face heat up. “You really think so? That it’s genius?”

“Of course!” Inko beams. “You know,” She says, putting a hand on her face thoughtfully. “I could make some card-related patches to sew onto your costume!”

“Really?” He asks, his grin so wide it hurts the corner of his mouth.

--

Izuku sits through the description of the practical portion of the exam with gritted teeth. He gets scolded for mumbling, but it doesn’t do much except worsen the anxiety already buzzing under his skin. He knew that it would be difficult, but this? He doesn’t know how he’s going to get through it.

The written portion has been easy enough, but he knows he didn’t get 100%, and even if he did, bombing the practical is a sure way to guarantee he won’t get in. There are only 36 spots for non-recommendation students, after all, and he’s sure at least 36 students will do well enough on the practical to make up for Izuku doing better than them in the written portion. If he did better than them, which he probably didn’t. His chest feels tight thinking about it, so he shakes the thought away and tries to focus on what he’s doing.

When he gets to the battle center, he can see the way the others are talking about him. The tall, blue haired boy with the thick calves who called him out during the presentation is bad enough, but the other guys whispering? He tries his best to ignore their whispers, and he turns to see the girl who stopped him from tripping on the way to the exam. Her short brown hair is hiding her face from him as he approaches, hands clenched at his sides to give him something to focus on other than his nerves.

A heavy hand comes down on his shoulder, and to his credit, he doesn’t flinch as badly as he would have before his time on the streets. He still jumps though, and *squeaks*, a little embarrassing

noise in his throat. When he turns and sees blue-hair, he almost starts to tear up.

“What are you doing?” the kid asks, towering over Izuku despite the fact that they’re surely the same age. “Can’t you see she’s trying to focus?”

“R-Right...” Izuku answers, dropping his gaze down and to the side. His face burns with hot shame, and he curses himself for assuming that he’d be any different with social interactions now. He’d *thought* he’d gotten better, what with his confidence fighting in his costume, but it doesn’t seem to have transferred over to his daily life. He still feels that familiar flutter of his heart and squeezing of his lungs when someone talks to him, that dread that they’re going to hit him or yell. The other guy drops his hand and goes back to ignoring Izuku though, so he supposes he won’t have to deal with getting into a fight right now.

He starts when Present Mic starts to announce again.

“Alright, the exam starts now!” He pauses, and Izuku wonders if he’s watching the shocked look on their faces. “There aren’t any countdowns in the hero world!”

Izuku freezes, staring at the model streets that stretch out before him, and even though he can hear everyone around him running and moving, he doesn’t take a step. He finds that, even with all of his training and fighting and studying, he doesn’t know what to do here. He doesn’t know how to find a robot or how to take it down. It’s not like the streets at night; here, it’s loud on all sides, the sounds of fighting surrounding him.

He turns on his heels when he hears the screech of metal behind him, and he watches as a blond boy with violet eyes shoots a two pointer down with a laser from his stomach. Izuku swallows, taking a step back, then starts to jog in a random direction. Somehow, he’d thought the exam would be something else. Something where knowledge or wits would be enough. As his shoes slap against the concrete, too clean to be like that of the actual city, he’s hit with a wave of sickening despair. All he wants to do is fucking *kill himself*, get a restart on this whole day. He can’t, though, not here. There’s cameras everywhere, surely. They wouldn’t let anyone die at the exam.

He hears a creaking, crushing sound, and he rushes towards it. His shoes skid on loose rubble as he turns the corner, only to watch the blue-haired guy crush a robot with a neatly timed kick. Izuku hisses in frustration, whipping around and running the other direction. He just has to get as much information as he can this time and pray that he resets before the start of the exam next time.

He starts by running toward the boundary of the exam area, stopping at the tall concrete wall, and turning to run along it. If he gets a good mental map of the city, he’ll have a better idea of where to go to defeat the robots. Or so he hopes. He can hear the sounds of fighting, but there don’t seem to be many students around the edge like this, and he turns when he reaches the corner of the area, almost smacking directly into the body of a one-pointer. He hisses, skidding back and catching himself on the wall, barely avoiding losing his balance. The robot, all sharp grey metal, turns its head to look at him.

“Target acquired,” it says, no inflection in its voice, then it raises a metal arm and slams it down in a messy swipe that misses Izuku by... a lot. Izuku realizes, then, that he might actually have a chance if he fights these things. He reaches his hand for his utility belt and hisses in frustration to find nothing. Of course, he hadn’t brought it; he’s supposed to be an ordinary middle school kid right now.

Izuku hops out of the way of another swipe, then ducks forward, underneath the robot’s chin. He thrusts a palm upward, the meat of his hand striking the metal and pushing the robot’s head up a little ways. It jerks, a metallic noise, and Izuku slides back, shaking out his hand. The metal is hard

and unyielding, and Izuku almost misses punching people. Almost.

The robot turns like it's going to try and hit him again, but Izuku meets its swipe with a wide kick, and to his surprise, it completely knocks the leg of the robot off. He blinks, then remembers these are supposed to be easy; that's why they're one point. He grins, then aims another kick at the robot's head, this time not trying to be cautious of its limbs. Sure enough, the head pops off and lands on the nearby ground with a clang, and the robot stops, stiff and frozen in place.

"One point..." Izuku mutters, then takes off running around the perimeter again. He knows better than to think one point is enough, but it's still *something*, and Izuku feels infinitely better for it.

"Four minutes remaining!" Present Mic's voice calls, and Izuku winces, picking up his pace. He'll have to find something tall to jump off of right after, for the best chance of it resetting him far enough back, but he should still use these four minutes to do... something.

He hears a crash, something louder and heavier than the other robots, and he whips around to see what has to be a zero pointer, its head poking up from where it stands in the center of the mock city. Izuku swallows, then shakes his head and runs toward it. The perimeter can wait; he needs information on the zero pointers as well, if he wants to be able to successfully avoid them next time.

A few other kids run past him, moving in the opposite direction. He figures that nobody wants to get slowed down by the obstacle, and Izuku would be doing the same thing under normal circumstances. Instead, he runs, skirting around the side of a broken robot and racing toward the zero pointer, the huge robot that towers over the buildings.

He hears her before he sees her, just a tiny whimper that barely reaches his ears. It's probably only because the other kids had destroyed so many of the lower level robots that he hears it in the first place, and he zeroes in on the source of the sound, the girl with the gravity quirk, trapped under a huge piece of rubble and staring up at him, her face flushed and sweaty. Izuku doesn't even think; he runs forward, a hand extended already. He can see the zero pointer swinging an arm down at him to attack, the movement clear enough even in his peripheral vision, but he doesn't care. He'll save her even if it kills him.

Except he doesn't get there in time. The robot hits him first, a giant sweeping strike that pulls him up off his feet and tosses him like a toy into the side of one of the buildings, almost two stories off the ground. He gasps as the breath is knocked out of him, his vision whiting out for a moment with the burst of pain in his back. He feels himself sliding down the building, then feels his legs crumple when he hits the ground, watching himself on all fours and shaking in place.

He's concussed, for sure, because he doesn't remember the exam ending or being taken to the infirmary. Things start to clear up when Recovery Girl gives him a healing kiss, but his mind stays too blurred to be healthy. He thanks her for her help and walks out of the infirmary and the campus, straight for the fire escape he knows is tall enough for the jump to kill him. He climbs it and jumps off, even though it's broad daylight and someone could see him. He doesn't care; he just needs another try.

--

"Can't you see she's trying to focus?" blue-hair-kid snaps at him, and Izuku just blinks in response, trying to reorient himself. He must be outside the battle center, right before the exam starts. It's pretty much ideal, since he can start with the full time of the test.

"Are you... alright?" Blue hair folds his arms over his chest. "You're muttering again." Izuku looks

up at him, sees he's raised one eyebrow in a look of... disapproving concern?

"Um," Izuku replies eloquently, shaking his head. "I'm okay! I just mumble when I think," he replies, and the blue haired kid just sighs.

Present Mic's voice covers whatever he says in response. "Alright, the exam starts now!" Izuku doesn't hesitate this time; he starts sprints off toward where he remembers a one-pointer even before the other kids start moving. He thinks he hears somebody shouting after him, but he ignores it, instead spinning around to kick the one pointer's head right off of its body. He bites back the urge to grin stupidly, instead taking off toward the one pointer he found at the perimeter last time.

He knows he's got about six minutes until they spawn in the zero pointer, so he can spend the first five or so collecting points, then he'll need to go and try to save the girl with the gravity quirk and the nice brown eyes. He knows he doesn't *have* to, it's just an exam, they wouldn't let her get hurt, but-- he wants to.

The minutes fly by, his breath coming quick as he takes down a second and third one-pointer. He's running back for the center already when Present Mic announces the time, and the crash of the zero-pointer entering the arena doesn't startle him this time. He runs, cool and collected toward the center. He feels like a hero.

And then he sees the rock collapse on the girl and he knows what he has to do. He runs forward, towards her with a hand outstretched. He skids to a stop in front of her and she takes his hand, her face pained and her breath coming out as a wheezing gasp. He tugs, feeling her muscles tense as she tries to use the motion to pull herself free, but it doesn't work. He grimaces.

"Hold on," he says, and he skirts around behind her, to where the rock is pinning her down. He kneels to get a better look and *oh*, her left leg is completely pinned. It doesn't look crushed, but....

He tries to lift the stone, but when he does, the rocks surrounding her rumble worryingly and it doesn't really budge more than an inch or two.

"Is it working?" The girl asks, and he glances over to see her craning her neck back to watch. He bites his lip.

"Um. I don't think so," he replies, and she frowns.

"I can try to use my quirk?" She says, reaching a hand back, struggling, but it doesn't quite reach the rock on her legs. She groans, stretching, and Izuku hears something loud above them. He looks up just in time to see the zero pointer about to smash into them, and instinctively, he closes his eyes, waiting to wake up.

Except, after a moment, when he opens his eyes, the zero pointer is frozen inches from his face, and Present Mic is announcing the end of the test. Izuku is still staring at the zero pointer. It occurs to him that he only has three points.

"Are you okay?" The girl asks, even though she's still under the rubble. He sees a number of smaller bots, clearly some kind of helpers to get the girl out from under the rubble.

"Yeah," he answers, and he doesn't know what kind of look he has on his face, but she frowns. "I'm fine."

He walks right out of the test, and they let him go because he's uninjured. He walks to Aldera Middle School, this time, instead of a random fire escape. He jumps off of it and wonders if he should even bother trying next time.

--

He opens his eyes just in time for that kid to say, "Can't you see she's trying to focus?" Izuku turns to him, annoyed all of a sudden. He wants this kid to shut *up* and let him have a moment.

"What's your name?" He asks instead of snapping like he wants to, makes himself take a deep breath.

The kid blinks. "Tenya Iida."

"Izuku Midoriya," Izuku replies to be polite. He turns to look into the city, takes a deep breath. The second the Present Mic starts speaking, Izuku takes off.

The first few minutes of the test are a blur. He knows he takes down the same three one-pointers as last time, but he doesn't remember getting the bruise on the outside of his arm, and he doesn't know if he took down the three-pointer to his left or if someone just left its body near him. He suddenly slips back into focus like waking up after sleeping or taking a breath after being underwater, and it's a disconcerting feeling. He hasn't ever lost time like that, not before, and he doesn't know how to feel about it.

I don't have time to worry about my mental state, he thinks as he hears Mic make the four minute announcement. He's already pretty close to the center, but this time, he stops at the crumbled body of a two-pointer before running over to the girl. He'd watched Iida take this one down the first time through, and as he picks up a long piece of metal, about the length of one of his legs and thick enough to be sturdy but thin enough for him to use it like a crowbar. He hopes this works, because he isn't repeating the test again because the test isn't *fair*. He feels bitterness rise in his chest, hot and stifling as he runs to the piles of rubble that just fell.

The girl sees him coming, and he shouts at her. "What's your name?" He takes a breath. "I'm going to get you out of there!"

"Ochako Uraraka!" She replies. "And that would be really nice!" He grins at that, sliding to a stop in front of the rubble and shoving the end of the metal underneath it.

"I'm gonna try to lift the rock up," he says, pushing it deeper under the stone. "When you can reach it," he grunts, starting to move the rubble. "Use your quirk on it." His voice is strained and he has to squeeze his eyes shut, pushing down on the makeshift lever with all of his body weight. He can hear the zero-pointer above them, but he doesn't open his eyes because he knows it'll distract him.

Suddenly, the weight of the rock disappears and he trips forward, stumbling. "Got it!" Uraraka shouts, and he opens his eyes just in time to see her catching him, stopping him from faceplanting in the ground. "Second time I got you," she says, grinning, and he returns the smile.

"Let's get out of here!" She says, tugging him forward and running away from the zero-pointer. Izuku can tell from the way she's running that her ankle hurts, and he bites his lip, then tugs her down a narrow alleyway.

"Your ankle is hurt," he shouts over the noise of the zero-pointer. "The test is about to end, so it'll stop chasing us soon anyway." He reaches into his pocket and pulls out the only thing he brought from his utility belt-- the first aid kit his mom gave him.

"Oh!" She says, her eyes widening. "You're so smart! I didn't even think to bring a medical kit!"

Izuku feels his face heat up as he gets out an ace bandage. "I-It's nothing special, r-really..." he

says, wrapping her ankle up carefully, the way his mom showed him to.

“The test is over!” Present Mic shouts, and Izuku sighs, biting his lip and finishing the wrap of her ankle.

“I only got 28 points,” she says, sighing. “I don’t know if that’s enough to get in...”

“D-Don’t worry,” Izuku says. “You did a lot better than me.”

Chapter End Notes

cw: vomiting

sorry for the lower quality on this chapter... i write this fic (and all of my fics, really) to vent and to give myself comfort, which is really nice and works as a coping mechanism, but today was kind of a rough day and i had trouble focusing on the writing for very long. at least i feel better with it written!

also im a sucker for inko she's best mom

quirk assessment

Chapter Summary

last time: izuku takes the entrance exam

Chapter Notes

im so sorry this is shorter than usual! i wrote a reallllly long oneshot earlier and my writing juice is all out :(

the next update may not be tomorrow either :(i have classes and work starting tomorrow, and it's the day of a big deadline for me, so the update may be late! im sorry in advance!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

The week after the exam passes by in a blur. Izuku knows that his mom is worried about him, can tell from the way she hovers and the way she keeps baking sweets, but he doesn't have it in him to reassure her. The thing is, he knows that he's failed, and him telling her that he knows and having her reply with optimism, like...

"Oh, Izuku, I'm sure you did better than you think!" Her face stretches in a grin, and Izuku finds himself mirroring it.

"It's okay, mom," He nudges the rice with his chopstick but doesn't pick any up.

...it kills him inside. He doesn't think he can take it, so when she bursts into his room, her eyes wide and face flushed, he's already dreading whatever attempt to cheer him up she has next.

"Izuku, it's here!" she says instead, her voice barely above a whisper but so choked with excitement and Izuku feels like she's shouting at him. "The letter from UA!"

Izuku swallows, reaching out his hand and taking it from her when she offers it to him. It's heavy, heavier than a rejection letter should be, but Izuku doesn't get his hopes up. He'd thought about it for a long time, and even if points weren't the only thing they were being evaluated on, there's still the fact that all he did was run around and save someone who wasn't in any real danger. That, and the fact that he's legally quirkless, *functionally* quirkless too, the fact that his application said "Not applicable" under the section for quirk powers and title. His legal registration has a code on it, something that he wouldn't even know if he wasn't the one it was describing. It says, in typed print, "TJN;AQ." Toe joint negative; assumed quirkless. It's the code for people, like him, who are functionally useless even though they *should*, by all of the rules, have a quirk. They got unlucky, got one that was so tiny or so hard to activate that it may as well not exist. Or they're just quirkless despite their feet. Science doesn't seem to be sure.

Izuku does have a quirk, after all, but that's beside the point because *legally* he does not. He stares at the thick paper of the envelope, the thick legal-type paper that means he couldn't see inside of

the letter even if he tried.

“...Izuku?” His mom says, and he looks up to see her worried face. “Aren’t you going to open it?”

Izuku bites his lip, looks back down at the letter. “Could I... Could I do it alone?” he asks, voice soft. His mom must hear him, because she hums in response and he hears his door click shut.

He takes a deep breath, then rips the letter open, flinching back when a heavy metal disc falls onto his desk with a clatter. He blinks, and thinks *a holograph projector?* just as it starts to project.

He feels his jaw drop when he sees that it’s *All Might* announcing the results, and even though he’s been... less crazy about the guy lately... he’s still a little starstruck to see him in a personalized message like this. So starstruck, in fact, that he misses the first few seconds of the tapes. He gives himself a shake and leans forward, gluing his eyes to the project just as All Might points at him.

“So, young Midoriya, you received an impressive score on the written exam, and five battle points on the practical exam,” All Might is smiling, even though Izuku is so nervous he’s shaking. “Normally, of course, this would be insufficient to get into UA, however....”

The screen shifts, and Izuku finds himself biting his lip hard enough to draw blood. It shows Uraraka, on the day of the exam judging by her outfit, looking nervous as she approaches Present Mic.

“Um, Present Mic?” She presses her index fingers together, looking at the ground.

“Yes, how can I help you, little listener?” Present Mic replies, and Izuku knows it’s too loud from the way Uraraka jumps a little. She looks at the pro hero.

“Um, do you know Midoriya? He, um, he has curly green hair,” she gestures above her head, “and is kinda plain looking? He was one of the kids in my group.”

Present Mic nods and says. “I’m familiar, yes!”

“I was wondering if I could... give him some of my points?” She looks at the ground, shuffling her feet. “It’s just... he helped me out, even though he didn’t have much time left, and he even wrapped my ankle for me!” She points at the ankle, which must have been healed since the wrapping was gone. “I don’t know how many points he has, but he said he had less than me? And I just wanted to see if I could maybe help him, since he helped me...”

Present Mic blinks at her, then smiles wide. “Well, we don’t allow students to give away points, but you shouldn’t worry!” He leans in and stage whispers, conspiratorially. “You and Midoriya don’t have anything to worry about.” Izuku blinks when he hears that, and he swears he doesn’t imagine the way Present Mic glances at the camera.

The screen cuts back to All Might, and he gestures at a pop-up of what looks like a blank table of results. “Midoriya! You received 5 battle points, but that wasn’t the only thing we were looking for in the practical portion. Students were also awarded rescue points based on their ability and willingness to help others even at a potential cost to themselves, as well as their ability to remain calm and collected and work with others during a crisis.” All Might’s grin widens. “Midoriya, the judges all agreed that you and Uraraka showed incredible potential. You quickly put together a plan to help a fellow student, even knowing you did not have enough battle points. You communicated with her efficiently and administered appropriate first aid. For this, you received 60 rescue points.”

Izuku’s jaw drops at the display behind All Might populates with names and point values. Izuku’s

name is in the 6th place, just above Iida. He quickly scans the names and sees Uraraka in 9th place, with 28 battle points and 30 rescue points.

All Might starts talking again, and Izuku refocuses on the holographic man. “Uraraka was given 30 rescue points for the use of her quirk and her ability to stay calm and act logically even in the face of danger. You and young Uraraka truly demonstrated how pros should help each other and work together to conquer difficult situations.”

“With that out of the way, I would like to officially announce that you, Izuku Midoriya, have been accepted into UA’s hero course in class 1-A. Midoriya, welcome to your hero academia.” All might bows, then the hologram flickers out, and Izuku is vaguely aware of the fact that his mouth is as wide open as possible. He just stares at the spot where All Might had been, thinks those words over and over again. *I’m accepted. I’m accepted. I’m accepted.*

He stands up, wiping his sleeve at the tears running down his face, and bursts out of his room. His mom is in the living room, sitting on the table with a mug of steaming tea, and she startles when he appears suddenly, jostling her mug.

“Izuku? What’s wrong?” She pushes her chair back and stands up, her face worried. “You’re crying...”

Izuku shakes his head and all but throws himself at her. “I got in! Mom, I did it, I got into UA!” He wraps his arms around her, and she returns the tight hug.

“Oh, Izuku,” she has a smile in her voice, and she squeezes him tightly. “You did it!” She laughs, almost lifting him off the ground. “You did it, baby!”

“I did it!” Izuku crows happily, his eyes still full of happy tears. He bruises his face in his mom’s shoulder and laughs, shaky uneven laughs.

She makes katsudon for them that night, and she puts on his favorite All Might tape and Izuku doesn’t even feel bitter at the hero. He thinks that maybe, it’s okay that All Might told him he couldn’t be a hero. Maybe he can prove All Might wrong at UA.

I’m going to UA, he thinks, gleefully. I’m going to be a hero!

--

On the first day of classes, Izuku is trembling before he even steps onto campus. He’s standing outside the gate, and he’s pretty sure he’s going to melt, looking up at the huge entrance. He’s dreamed about it for so long that seeing it now, in his grey uniform and with his student ID in his pocket, doesn’t feel real. He feels people pushing past him, walking through the gates, but he just stands and stares, open mouthed.

“Midoriya!” He turns at the familiar face, just in time for Uraraka to practically crash into him. “You’re here!” She grabs his hands, jumping up and down. “We made it!”

Izuku blinks and smiles, feeling his face heat up. “Um-- yeah!”

She grins, bright and happy, then lets go of his hands. “They told me you’d gotten in too, and I was so happy!” She starts walking forward again, and Izuku scrambles after her, glancing nervously up at the gate as they pass under it. “The rescue points thing totally caught me off guard!”

“Y-Yeah, me too.” Izuku replies, letting her lead him deeper into campus. “I thought for sure I’d failed,” he admits, and he returns her smile.

“This is just so amazing!” She says, gushing. “Oh! What class are you in?”

“1-A,” Izuku replies.

“Oh, me too!” She bounces on her feet. “C’mon, let’s go and see who else is in our class!”

Izuku lets Uraraka lead him through the halls, and he’s kind of glad that she’s helping him because he has no idea of where the classes are, even though he’s sure he’d looked at a map before coming here. He just couldn’t remember, not with how amazing it is that he’s at UA of all places. It’s like something out of a dream.

He watches Uraraka open the *huge* door to the classroom, and he follows her inside, looking at...

Oh. Izuku stares right at Kacchan where he’s sitting in the center of the class, arguing with Iida of all people. Izuku feels his stomach drop when Kacchan turns his head, makes eye contact with Izuku. He watches the look on Kacchan’s face warp into something poisonous, something ugly. Izuku takes a step back, half on purpose and half on instinct.

“Izuku?” Uraraka whispers, just at the same time that Kacchan speaks.

“Deku,” he sneers, getting up from his desk. “What the *hell* are you doing here?”

“I, um, I--” Izuku stops, flinching when Kacchan sets off a small explosion, the blast crackling in the air.

“I thought I told you to apply somewhere fucking else,” Kacchan growls, but he doesn’t approach Izuku, doesn’t try to hurt him. Izuku thinks *that’s good, he won’t get himself in trouble*.

“If you’re quite finished,” a deep, oddly familiar voice from the front of the room interrupts. “Take your seats. If you’re just here to continue middle school drama, you can see yourself out.” Izuku pinpoints the source of the voice, a yellow sleeping bag at the front of the classroom. It unzips, and Izuku gasps.

“Eraserhead?” He whisper-shouts, and Eraser’s eyes focus on him. The man looks different without the googles, more tired and yet also scarier at the same time. He arches an eyebrow. Izuku prays, prays he doesn’t recognize him.

Izuku scrambles into his seat, next to Uraraka and Iida, and thankfully, Eraserhead doesn’t seem to recognize him. It’s a relief, but he’s still on edge, like a live wire.

“I’m Aizawa Shouta. I’m your homeroom teacher,” Aizawa says, and Izuku’s jaw drops. Eraserhead, the underground hero, is their *homeroom teacher*? The only person (probably) who could kill Izuku, and the only person to have talked with his vigilante self for any length of time? He wishes he could die for real, if only to spare himself from the panic attack he’ll have later over this.

“And yes, Midoriya,” the teacher drawls. “I am the pro hero Eraserhead. I have no earthly idea how you knew that, but I also don’t care.” He sighs, blinking slowly. “We’ll be skipping the opening ceremony. Get dressed.” He unzips his bag more, pulls out a bunch of uniforms like the ones from the entrance exam, and starts tossing them over the desk and at students.

Izuku has a feeling this is going to be a long day.

--

When they're all there, dressed in their sports uniforms and looking a little lost, Iida approaches Izuku, walking stiffly and neatly.

"Midoriya. I want to say, I misjudged you at the entrance exam." Iida looks at Izuku through his glasses. "You clearly knew something about that exam that the rest of us didn't. I'm sorry for underestimating you. I'd like to start over," he extends a hand like he's asking for a handshake, and Izuku awkwardly takes it, feeling his whole body shake when Iida gives it a firm squeeze.

"T-That's fine," Izuku says, mostly because he doesn't know what else to say.

"Alright," Aizawa's voice interrupts their conversation, and they break away from their handshake, both turning to face their teacher. He's lost the sleeping bag and is now wearing something pretty much identical to his hero outfit. Izuku shivers. It reminds him of how easily he could be caught.

"We'll be doing a quirk assessment activity today," he says, and Izuku feels his heart drop into his stomach.

Aizawa explains how the test is going to work, has Kacchan demonstrate by throwing a ball with explosive force, and it takes everything Izuku has to stay focused on his teacher's words.

"This sounds like it'll be fun," someone whispers, and Izuku flinches at the way Aizawa's head whips around to look at them.

"Fun, huh? You've only got three years to become a hero," Aizawa says, his voice deadly serious. "Will you treat it as a game that whole time? Fine. Whoever scores last in this test will be judged to have no potential and will be expelled."

And that's the kicker, right? Izuku takes in a deep breath, and the sounds of his own brain drown out Uraraka's protests about the test being unfair or something. It is. She just doesn't know *how* unfair it is, or *why*, because Izuku might not be quirkless but Aizawa doesn't know that. Aizawa thinks he's quirkless and he's doing this anyway. Izuku thought he would be free of this in high school, that the hero school that accepted quirkless students would at least treat them better, but now he isn't so sure.

The tests pass by in a blur. Izuku gapes at the abilities of his classmates, and he knows he improves his own score, but it isn't enough. He keeps track in his head, roughly, and he knows he's a little behind even the invisible girl and the guy who can summon animals, even though they can't really use their quirks for this. It makes his head hurt, a little, when Uraraka throws that ball and hits infinity, but he tries to be happy for her. Maybe they'll stay friends even after he's expelled.

The test ends, and Aizawa sighs. "Here are your results," he says, and he makes his phone display them for everybody to see. Izuku hopefully, hopefully reads through the names, his heart sinking lower and lower with every one that isn't his. He's dead last. He feels like he's going to throw up.

"Midoriya," Aizawa says. "You're expelled. You can't be a hero," and it hurts Izuku in a way that he hasn't felt since that first day on the roof, since he stood there and heard All Might tell him those same words.

"Because I'm quirkless?" he whispers, and he hears someone gasp behind him, but he doesn't look back. It doesn't matter anyway. He already knows that this run through is a dud, that as soon as he's done here he'll go home and draw a bath, place his knife next to the tub. Bleed out, slowly.

Aizawa's eyebrow twitches. "No, not because you're quirkless." He sighs, tipping his head back like this is a *chore* for him. "Because that's *all* you are. A quirkless person can become a hero," he

says, leveling Izuku with a gaze full of something dark. “But you can’t get there with hard work and determination alone. Trying your best to win the same way as everyone else is stupid and all it’ll do will get you killed.”

Izuku meets his gaze, and he feels a heat burning in his chest, something angry and strong. “So you’re saying it’s not because I’m quirkless, but because I’m trying my best?” He knows his voice comes out clipped and in the back of his head, he’s panicking, but somehow knowing that this isn’t the last time he’ll be here makes it easier to be defiant.

“Heroes need to know their limits,” Aizawa says, meeting his gaze without so much as a twitch. “You’re dismissed.” His voice is cold, nothing like when he questioned Izuku as Ace, and Izuku wonders which one is the act. He nods curtly, then turns on his heels and pushes past his ex-classmates, ignoring Uraraka calling after him. It doesn’t matter. He’ll see her again.

When he gets home, his mom isn’t there and he can take his time. He draws a hot bath, sharpens his knife on the whetstone his mom got him to celebrate him getting into UA. He waits for the water to fill the tub, sitting on the bathroom floor and drawing little red lines in the skin of his arms, one for each assessment exercise. It’s stupid, and he knows they’ll be gone when he wakes up, but it’s the only little rebellion he’ll allow himself. If he gets snappy with Aizawa next time or messes up again, it’ll be worse for him. This is okay; it’s not really hurting himself, since he’s going to reset everything in just a bit.

He sinks into the water, and slits his wrists.

--

He wakes up right as the class gasps, Uraraka jumping to her feet.

“But, sensei, that isn’t fair!” She’s frowning, and Izuku is trying to remember when this happened. “Not everyone has a quirk that will help them with physical stuff. And it’s only the first day, you can’t expel us!”

“I can,” Aizawa says, and Izuku thinks *ah, right here*. “And I will. Life isn’t fair. Heroics isn’t fair. Get used to it.” And he starts the tests.

Izuku knows what he’s going to do, as soon as he processes that even though she doesn’t know it, Uraraka was defending him. He knows it’s a gamble; Aizawa is either going to hate it or love it, and if he hates it, Izuku isn’t sure that there’s a way for him to get through this first day. But he has to try.

So, when it’s his turn, when Aizawa tells him to throw the ball, that he can do anything as long as he stays in the circle, Izuku turns right at him and gives him a smile. It’s shaky, but it’s there. Aizawa doesn’t react, not visibly, but that’s fine. Izuku turns to Uraraka.

“Um, Uraraka, w-would you mind floating this for me?” He extends the ball so she can reach it without stepping outside of the circle.

Her face lights up with understanding. “Oh! Yeah, of course!” She skips over to it and taps it with all five fingers, and Izuku feels it go weightless in his hand.

“Thanks!” he chirps, then glances over at Aizawa.

“Midoriya,” Aizawa starts, sighing dramatically, but Izuku doesn’t wait for him.

“Heroes need to know their limits, right?” Izuku says, and he sees Aizawa’s eyes widen just the

tinest bit and Izuku clenches his fist around the ball. “I don’t have anything that can help me with these tests, so I asked for help. I didn’t leave the circle, so it should be fine, right?”

“...Right,” Aizawa replies. “Go on.”

Izuku turns forward and throws the ball forward and up, launching it into the air just like Uraraka had. He feels the smile splitting his face.

When they get the results, Izuku isn’t last, and even though he’s only one place higher than last time, he feels himself relax. He can’t believe that that trick worked!

“As for the expulsion,” Aizawa says. “That was just a logical ruse, to draw out the best in you. You may all get cleaned up for your next class.”

Izuku stares at him, and he knows he’s making a dumb face from the way Aizawa glances at him, but he can’t help himself because he *knows* it wasn’t just a ruse. He expelled Izuku. He *expelled* Izuku and Izuku *killed himself* over it. It makes him sick to his stomach, and as they walk back to the locker rooms, he can’t help but think there could be any reason for it other than his supposed quirklessness. Why else would Aizawa spare a quirked student from expulsion, but not Izuku?

It’s not the worst Izuku’s had, not worse than being shoved into lockers and beaten and told to kill himself, but right now it feels like it is. He bites his lip and thinks that if his homeroom teacher hates the quirkless, well, then he’s in for a rough year.

Chapter End Notes

cw: self ha

i hope you enjoyed!!! thank you all for all of the sweet comments you leave me; they mean a lot!

battle simulation

Chapter Summary

last time: izuku gets into 1-A and promptly gets his ass expelled

Chapter Notes

me: i can't update today
also me: updates

dfjkgdhfkj i actually had a ton of fun writing this chapter!! i usually haaaate rewriting canon shit because it feels so repetitive and restrictive, but i sorta just ignored canon and did what i felt like for this and it was nice!! USJ is coming up so that'll be more canon rewrites, but i have some idea of how to make that interesting, so don't worry !

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

The rest of his classes are so normal that it's almost hard to believe he's at UA and not just an ordinary high school. The fact that pro heroes are his teachers sort of helps remind him, though, and he's grateful to find that Present Mic and Midnight don't seem to have the same issues with him as Aizawa does. It's a relief, and by the time he's headed to lunch, he doesn't feel quite so pessimistic, because Uraraka and Iida are walking with him to the lunch room.

"I'm really excited," Uraraka says, punching the air. "Lunch Rush's cooking has got to be *amazing*, right? And it's free with our tuition!" She's walking backwards, facing them, and Izuku can tell that it's driving Iida crazy from the way his hands keep shooting out to stop her from running into things just moments before she corrects herself.

"Uraraka, I agree, but please walk properly. You're going to run into something," he says, and Izuku grins when Uraraka sticks a tongue out at him.

"I can see where I'm going in the reflection of your glasses!" She says, laughter in her voice, and Izuku snickers alongside her as they step into the mess hall, the smells of food washing over them. Izuku feels his mouth water, and he glances around to see the various lunch lines. There are brightly colored displays on TVs above each line, showing a picture of what they're serving. Izuku's happy to see the image of a bowl of katsudon, the chicken crispy and golden brown on top of a bed of rice.

"Still!" Iida says, a little flustered, and Uraraka rolls her eyes, turning to walk normally.

"Let's sit here," she says, dropping her backpack at the end seat at a nearby table. "We can get our food and meet back up! I'm going to get the curry."

"Okay!" Izuku says. "I'm going for the katsudon, I think."

Iida nods. "I will also be getting the curry! I am excited to try Lunch Rush's preparation of the

tofu.”

Uraraka giggles, and she waves at Izuku as she and Iida walk over to the first line, while Izuku heads to the last line. It’s a nice feeling, knowing that he has friends to sit with, but it’s a foreign feeling too. He’s used to eating outside, alone, and praying that his bullies don’t try to go looking for him. He steps into the line for the katsudon, and waits, listening to the bustling sounds of the cafeteria.

He’s become accustomed to using his sense of sound more since he started with his Ace thing, but he’s still way better at listening to the quiet, subtle sounds of the city at night. The cafeteria is loud, with the background chatter of many students talking and the sounds of utensils clinking. He can hear, faintly, the sizzling of food in hot pans and the clanking of metal from the kitchen. The room smells like fried food and heavy spices, and if he focuses, he can smell the faint, sweet smell of cooked rice. He breathes deeply.

He gets his food, and it looks *amazing*. Two slices of chicken, a bowl of perfectly steamed rice, two kinds of pickled vegetables, and an orange. It’s healthier than the version his mom makes, but he supposes it makes sense. Lunch Rush has to keep their nutrition in mind, too! Izuku thinks that it’s amazing as he walks back toward the table he can already see Uraraka and Iida at, but when he’s only one table away, somebody claps a hand on his shoulder, making him jump.

“*Deku*,” he hears, and he knows it’s Kacchan even before he turns and sees the scowl on his face, those familiar red eyes.

“K-Kacchan,” he replies, starting to shake and stutter already, even though Kacchan hasn’t done anything yet.

“Don’t get too fucking comfortable,” Kacchan snarls. “I’m going to beat you into the ground hard enough that you drop out before Aizawa can expel your useless ass. Got it?”

Izuku doesn’t have to reply, because Kacchan shoves him and turns, sitting down at his own table, next to Kirishima and Ashido from class. The two are giving him a look like they’re a little bit wary of him, and Izuku forces himself to turn and walk the rest of the way to his seat, setting his tray down and sitting.

“What was that about?” Iida asks, an eyebrow raised, and Izuku just shakes his head.

“I-It’s nothing,” he replies.

“He called you Deku, right? That’s such a cute nickname!” Uraraka says, smiling. “Can I call you that?”

“It’s um. It’s an insult,” Izuku replies, nudging his rice around with his chopsticks.

“Really?” Uraraka says, surprised. “I thought it was like, ‘you can do it,’ y’know?”

Izuku blushes, looking up at her. “Y-You can call me Deku!” He squeaks out.

“But you just said it was an insult!” Iida says, sounding offended. “You agreed way too easily!”

“N-No, it’s okay!” Izuku says, smiling at both of his friends. “Um, it’s like r-reclaiming it, right? So I t-think it’s okay.”

“Yay!” Uraraka cheers, then takes a bite of her apple. “So, Deku,” she says around a mouthful of fruit. “What do you think of Aizawa-sensei?”

Izuku shrugs, puts a mouthful of rice in his mouth, then points at himself as if to say *my mouth is full!* Uraraka, thankfully, doesn't notice that it's anything more than him being hungry, and she laughs, turning to Iida to ask him some questions. Izuku listens along as he eats, and before he knows it, he's joining in. Lunch passes quickly, and Izuku's face hurts from smiling by the end of it.

--

The second day of class comes, and his morning classes pass uneventfully. Izuku spends more time than is strictly necessary stewing about Aizawa, but he doesn't think the teacher notices. He's good at hiding frustration with teachers; he's been doing it his whole life. Teachers never cared when he was bullied in middle school, so he didn't really like them very much. Izuku figures that at least nobody's bullying him here, so he can handle the usual disdain from teachers.

Today's the first day that they have heroics class, and Izuku is practically vibrating out of his skin. Yesterday, they'd just filled out a bunch of safety waivers and emergency contact forms, so it'd been painfully boring. Their teacher hadn't even shown *up*; Ectoplasm had given them the papers instead. Not that Izuku minds meeting Ectoplasm, especially given that he used his clones to pass things out more efficiently.

When it's All Might who pops into the gym, all giant shining grin and bulging muscles, Izuku thinks he might die a little bit. It's one thing to have your idol who told you that you can't be a hero give you your acceptance announcement; it's another thing entirely to have him teaching you *heroics*. Izuku thinks he might faint. He's not sure what's worse, if All Might remembers him, or if he doesn't.

It's probably because of this internal meltdown that Izuku totally misses the explanation of the exercise, but he figures out what's going on quick enough when All Might starts drawing names for teams. Izuku sighs in relief when All Might says,

"Midoriya and Uraraka," setting the two slips of paper in front of the letter A. Izuku watches as he selects the rest of the teams, then puts aside the box that had their names in it.

"Now, I'll draw which teams go first!" All Might announces, reaching into the box. "Team A, and..." he sets the paper aside, then pulls out another. "Team D! Midoriya and Uraraka will be the heroes, and Iida and Bakugou will be the villains."

Izuku chokes on his own spit, ignoring the way Uraraka shoots him a worried glance. He risks looking over at Kacchan, but the way the other boy just cracks his knuckles and sneers at Izuku... it certainly doesn't make him feel any better.

"Team D, go ahead and go into the building," All Might continues. "I'll give you about 5 minutes to get set up. You can put in your earpieces. They're just linked to your teammate, so the enemies won't hear you communicating." Izuku watches, body feeling like wood as Kacchan and Iida march out of the observation area, headed into the mock building. He wonders, vaguely, how long it'll be before Kacchan kills him and he wakes up, only to have to die over and over again. Maybe he'll get lucky and he'll reset far enough back that he can fake being sick and get out of the exercise.

"You okay, Deku?" Uraraka says, nudging him with her elbow. He glances over at her, sees her worried look through the visor of her costume. He nods.

"Y-Yeah, I'm okay..." He uses his gloved hands to smooth out his own costume. It's... a little too close to his Ace costume, really, what with the nearly identical utility belt and gloves, but his mom

had made the jumpsuit distinctive enough, based off of some of his drawings. They'd worked on the visor and faceguard together, ultimately deciding on a pair of simple shatterproof glasses and a high collar that would protect his face. The jumpsuit is the only thing she'd made herself-- the rest, they'd requested from support-- but the final result is so true to the design that they made together. It feels nice, to be able to wear it.

"We'll do just fine," Uraraka says, giving him a smile. "Don't stress yourself out about it before it even starts!"

"R-Right," Izuku says, nodding.

"Alright! Midoriya and Uraraka, you can go in now," All Might says, his voice booming over the loudspeakers. Izuku glances at Uraraka, and she nods before starting into the building.

"Uraraka, Kacchan's going to come after me," Izuku says, quick and quiet. "It's not ideal, but if you get away and surprise Iida, we might have a shot."

She nods. "Okay. Be careful, okay?"

"Okay," he replies, and she follows him as he walks into the building, glancing around quickly and trying to get a handle on his surroundings.

He hears Kacchan's footsteps, quick and angry and surprisingly light, so he knows to grab Uraraka's arm and yank her away from the wall in front of them. They jump back just in time for the wall to burst open in a concussive blast, making Izuku's ears ring.

"Go," he whispers, and Uraraka nods before taking off towards the stairs that Kacchan just revealed. She's gone before the dust clears, and that's good because when it does, Kacchan is stepping over the pile of rubble, punching a fist into his own hand and setting off a popping blast like he used to do after school to let Izuku know he was about to suffer.

"Deku," Kacchan spits. "You better not dodge. I'm not going to hurt you bad enough to make them stop this fight," he snarls, lunging forward with his right fist, "but I'm going to get pretty damn close!"

Izuku ducks under his punch, letting it sail over his head as he steps to Kacchan's side. The movement unbalances Kacchan slightly, and Izuku sweeps at his ankles with his foot, sending his childhood friend face down into the rubble.

"What the hell was that?!" Kacchan roars, propelling himself up off the ground just as Izuku slides back, out of his range.

"Y-You always start with a right hook, Kacchan," Izuku says as he reaches down, grabbing a chunk of rubble with his right hand. He runs to the side, ducking under a blast that comes so close to his shoulder that he thinks he might have a burn there. He steps into the hole in the wall Kacchan made, then lobbs the chunk of broken concrete he picked up right at Kacchan's head. He winces when it makes contact, knocking into the side of Kacchan's skull. Kacchan whips around to look at him, fire in his eyes.

"You think you're fucking better than me, huh?!" He rushes forward, grabbing Izuku by the front of his shirt. Izuku squirms, kicking out with his feet, desperately trying to get down before Kacchan blows his brains out.

"N-No, I don't!" he pants, then drops straight to the ground. Kacchan lets go of him in surprise, but it puts Izuku at a disadvantage because he has to roll across the sharp, uneven rubble to dodge

Kacchan's next explosion.

"Then why the *fuck*," Kacchan hisses, throwing a punch that hits Izuku square on the cheek, sending him stumbling back. "Do you think you can stand against me? A useless, quirkless extra like *you*?"

"K-Kacchan, I--" Izuku starts, but he has to stop when Kacchan explodes a fist right next to his head, making Izuku flinch. He knows he can fight better than this, knows that he's *better* than this, but something about Kacchan blowing up and calling him a quirkless loser makes him small and weak all over again.

"Deku?" Uraraka's voice comes through the earpiece. "Um. I'm sorry, Iida found me out. He got rid of anything I could float, and he's a lot faster than me..." Izuku bites his lip, ducks into a hallway, and starts running. Kacchan will catch up, but he needs a moment to talk to his teammate.

"Okay, um," He runs up the stairs, his breath coming quick. "Do you know how to fight?"

"Not really!" Uraraka gasps on the other end of the line, and Izuku winces, guessing that she was barely able to keep out of the way of Iida's kicks.

"Okay. Okay, so Iida uses his legs, which are um. They're longer range than arms." Izuku flinches at an explosion below him, prays that it'll take Kacchan at least another moment. "So if you focus on trying to punch him, on staying too close for him to kick, it'll be harder for him to get a good blow in." His feet are pounding on the concrete, and he wishes the building was big enough for him to try being stealthy, but there's no way when he knows Kacchan can just blow all the walls out if he needs to.

"How am I supposed to get the weapon?" Uraraka hisses, and Izuku clenches his jaw for a second, then answers.

"Is he sticking close to it, or staying with you?"

"Close to it," she replies.

"Okay," Izuku replies, just as he sees Kacchan round the corner. "I've got to go, but go around him, not in through him. His quirk probably makes it hard for him to stay in one place."

"Okay," Uraraka replies, and Izuku hopes he's not imagining the confidence in her voice. "Don't let Bakugou catch you!"

"I'll try," he says through gritted teeth as he *barely* dodges a punch, a left one. *Kacchan is on guard*, he thinks, sliding to Kacchan's side and praying that Uraraka beats Iida quickly enough that Izuku doesn't die.

"You know," Kacchan snarls, tilting his head. "You've got some real fuckin' nerve coming to UA. This is *my* dream, and you know damn well that my plan doesn't include you in it!" He punctuates his statement with a blast, louder than the others.

"I-I get to have dreams, too!" Izuku shouts before he can think, and he knows he's going to pay for it when Kacchan's eyes narrow.

"I requested these when I asked for my costume," Kacchan says, raising a grenade shaped glove. "I know you know how my quirk works, so I'll spare you the fucking details. These things store my sweat," Kacchan grins, and Izuku feels his chest sink. "And I've been letting them fill up all this time."

“Young Bakugou,” All Might’s voice fills the room, muffled through the walls all the same.
“Don’t use that, it’ll kill--”

“It won’t if he dodges,” Kacchan sneers, and he’s pulling the pin on his grenade arm just as Izuku has the sense to throw himself to the side and down.

He thinks he might lose consciousness for a moment, because he doesn’t register the sound of the actual blast, only the way his ears are ringing and he can taste blood. He coughs, soot choking his lungs, and he can’t hear his own breathing over the sharp ringing. His head hurts, he notes absently. He looks up to see Kacchan walking towards where he’s collapsed on the ground, holding his chest and head off of the blackened rubble with his forearms.

Izuku isn’t sure what possesses him, but as Kacchan raises a foot to stomp on him, he rolls to the side and grabs Kacchan’s standing leg, then leans forward and *bites* it, like he thinks he’s a feral animal. Kacchan topples over on top of him, and Izuku starts to hear him screaming over the ringing in his ears just as he winds the capture tape around Kacchan’s ankles.

“Bakugou is captured!” All Might’s voice rings out over the loudspeaker, and Izuku dully notices he still has his teeth buried in Kacchan’s calf, and that Kacchan is definitely hitting him on the back.

“Young Bakugou, stop!” All Might orders, and then pauses. “The battle is over. Uraraka has retrieved the weapon! The heroes win.” Izuku relaxes when he hears that, pulls his teeth out of Kacchan’s flesh, but that’s about all he can do. He lays there, limp, as Kacchan’s weight suddenly lifts off of him.

“Deku!” Uraraka’s voice fills his head, and he looks upward to see a furious Kacchan struggling in mid air and Uraraka crouching beside him with a bloody nose. “Are you alright? I heard All Might tell Bakugou to stop, and there was this horrible explosion...”

“You won,” he says, and his voice is a slur. Uraraka’s brows draw together. “You... got the weapon.”

“Only with your advice!” She says, and then carefully wraps her arms around his shoulders and hauls him up so he’s sitting on his butt instead of collapsed on the ground. “Jeez, you look like you got hit by a truck!”

“Got hit by a Kacchan,” he says weakly, and Uraraka laughs nervously, turning to look at something to her side.

“Hey, I think he has a concussion,” she says, and it’s the last thing Izuku hears before he’s dragged into unconsciousness. He wonders, briefly, if he’s dying.

--

When he opens his eyes in the infirmary, his first thought is that he’s been transported all the way back to when he was here after the entrance exam, after he failed and the zero pointer crushed him. He stares at the white light on the ceiling and feels his eyes burn, smells the sharp antiseptic and thinks, *I thought I’d died* .

And then he remembers that he was paired up against Kacchan in the battle simulation and jerks up into the sitting position, startling Uraraka and Iida where they’re sitting in chairs beside his bed.

“Deku!” Uraraka says, a smile splitting her face. “You’re okay!”

“He’s fine now,” Recovery Girl says, and Izuku glances over to see her at her desk, filling out paperwork. “But don’t tire him out, hm?”

“Yes ma’am!” Uraraka and Iida say in unison, and Izuku turns back to look at them.

“You were amazing,” Uraraka breathes. “We saw the footage after class, and you just-- you fought against him so well! And you give *perfect* instructions, I did what you said and I got around Iida and get the weapon no problem!”

“R-Really?” Izuku asks, feeling his face heat up. “Um. I-I’m sure it’s because of you, not--”

“It was really quite impressive how you managed to come up with a strategy under those circumstances,” Iida interrupts, pushing his glasses up onto his nose.

“I thought I was going to die,” Izuku says, sighing with relief, and he hears Uraraka chuckle, but it sounds a little nervous.

“Yeah, Bakugou’s really scary,” she says. “All Might told him to stop and everything, but he just went... boom.” She makes a little explosion gesture with her hands.

“You’ll be satisfied to hear that I gave him a lecture on following the teacher’s instructions,” Iida says, folding his arms over his chest. “We could have easily won that if he’d been calm and strategized, too. The villains were favored in the set-up of that exercise.”

“Yeah!” Uraraka says, nodding. “That’s why All Might said you were the most valuable player for our round! Because you took a difficult situation and worked through it, and you communicated with me and stuff!”

“All Might said that?” Izuku asks, feeling a little dizzy. “L-Like, *All Might*?”

“Yes!” Uraraka says, giggling. “The one and only!”

Izuku blinks, suddenly remembering that he was at school. “W-Wait, what about class? Am I late?”

“You’ve been asleep for a while, sonny.” Recovery Girl sounds mildly amused. “All you missed was the rest of battle training, if what your teacher told me over the phone was correct.”

“Mmhm!” Uraraka confirms. “School’s over, but me and Iida wanted to walk you home, since you hit your head and all. All Might said he’d give you a tape of the rest of the battles to watch next time he sees you.”

“Iida and I,” Iida corrects, pushing his glasses up on his face.

“You guys want t-to walk me home?” Izuku asks, blinking.

“If that’s alright with you,” Uraraka replies, and Izuku nods fervently. They walk him home, and when his mom absolutely lights up at seeing them, when she invites them to stay for dinner and to hang out, Izuku almost forgets the look on Kacchan’s face when they fought.

--

For all that he was hoping to stay away from Kacchan, Izuku isn’t surprised to see him waiting outside his house the next day. Izuku sees him, leaning against the fence and stuffing his phone in his pocket. He’s got his backpack slung over one shoulder.

“Deku,” Kacchan greets, and it’s less of a snarl than Izuku thought it would be.

“Kacchan,” Izuku says wearily. He shuts the door carefully behind him, locking it before turning to face his childhood friend. He knows Kacchan wouldn’t stop him from locking up, for all that he rages and acts impulsive. Kacchan likes Izuku’s mom; always has, more than Izuku likes Auntie Mitsuki anyway.

“How the fuck did you do it?” Kacchan growls, but he doesn’t put a hand on Izuku, just wraps his fingers tight on the fence. “How the fuck did you beat me? You’re *quirkless*,” and he says it like it’s a dirty word, like it’s something filthy. Izuku hates the way tears are already welling up in his eyes. He should be used to this by now.

“I-I’ve been working really hard, K-Kacchan,” he says, and his voice breaks, cracking.

“But *how* ?” Kacchan snarls, and Izuku realizes, suddenly, that his friend’s eyes are tearing up, too. “How did *you* beat *me*? Have you been tricking me this whole time?”

“N-No, I-” Izuku tries to get a word in edgewise, but Kacchan cuts him off.

“Ever since we were little kids,” he shouts, voice rising, “you were always fucking looking down on me! And now you’re at fucking UA and you beat me without a *quirk* .”

Izuku reaches out a hand, and before he knows what he’s doing, he’s placing his palm right on top of Kacchan’s hand where it’s digging into his poor fence. Kacchan *startles* , like Izuku burned him, then makes eye contact with him.

“Kacchan, I never looked down on you.” Izuku speaks, firm and calm like he does when he’s Ace and not Deku. “This whole time, I... I followed after you because I wanted to be *like* you. Because you’re just that amazing.”

Kacchan gapes at him, just staring, so Izuku presses on. “I... I shouldn’t tell you this, b-but... I do have a quirk. It just, um. I-It can’t be used in battle,” his voice is lowered, nearly to a whisper, and he can see Kacchan’s face starting to twitch, so he talks faster. “So I-I didn’t trick you! I d-didn’t know, um, until about three months ago. A-And I didn’t use it all in our fight so--”

“Whatever!” Kacchan snaps, pulling his hand away from Izuku’s and from the fence. “Do you think I care about any of that shit?” He shakes his head, scrubs at his face with a sleeve. “It’s just-- you didn’t see it, but that stupid half-and-half kid and ponytail chick, they’re-- they’re fucking amazing.” Kacchan takes in a breath, shaky. “I thought I was already at the top. But this is just the fucking beginning. I’m not backing down. I’m going to be number one!” He points a thumb back at himself, then points to Izuku. “And don’t you think I’ll let you beat me again, stupid Deku!”

Kacchan turns and starts to storm off, and Izuku blinks for a second before running after him. “W-Wait, Kacchan! We’re going to the same place, we should walk together!”

Kacchan blows up at him and snaps, but they walk together anyway, and Izuku knows that this is the closest Kacchan gets to an apology. It doesn’t make up for the years of bullying, for the nasty nickname and the burn scars. Hell, it doesn’t even make up for Kacchan breaking the rules to hurt him in the battle simulation. But it’s a start.

i hope you all enjoyed!! if you're missing ace, dw i am too! we'll get some vigilante time after his crazy first week of school is done with. also!! i will get around to replying to all of the comments!! they mean a lot to me and make me very happy im just shy at replying djfghdkfj

usj (part 1)

Chapter Summary

last time: izuku fights kacchan (wins) and tells him about his quirk (kind of)

Chapter Notes

hi hi hi!! i submitted my big scholarship application this morning and went to the gym this afternoon so today's been v v productive! this chapter isn't my best work, but that's because a lot of it is canon rewrite that's necessary to get to the new stuff. i wanted more of usj to be in this chapter, but it didn't all fit and i know the next bit will be long, so i decided to post what i have!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“Wait, so you’re quirkless?” Uraraka asks, mouth open. “I thought Bakugou was joking!”

Izuku flushes, picks at his bowl of curry with his chopsticks. “I, um. Y-Yeah.” He wonders, briefly, if it would be better to tell the school about his quirk, if only so he can keep friends while he’s here. He doesn’t look at her, doesn’t want to see the look of pity or disgust or disappointment on her face. It’s easier not to look at Iida, since he’s beside Izuku instead of across.

“Whoa!” She says, her smile evident in her voice. “That’s super impressive, honestly. I barely got through the entrance exam *with* my quirk!” Izuku glances up despite himself, sees her eyes wide with a huge grin, he risks a glance at Iida, who nods quickly and says,

“The test was clearly biased towards those of us with physical quirks, so it’s especially impressive that you made it into the top ten. If anything, it’s inspiration for all of us to work harder.”

“Oh, yeah!” Uraraka says, smacking her own forehead. “That’s why you’re so good at combat, right? Because you aren’t relying on a quirk!”

“Um,” Izuku says, not sure how to respond. He’s sure his face is a bright red, and it turns even brighter when Kirishima from the table behind Uraraka turns around, mouth gaping.

“Wait, for real dude? That’s insane!” He grins, nudging Kaminari beside him. “Dude, Midoriya’s a badass.”

Kaminari glances back at them, mouth clearly full of food and nods fervently. Izuku stares at the two of them, and he wonders if he’s making a weird face because Kirishima gives him an awkward smile and a thumbs up.

“You okay, Deku?” Uraraka says, tipping her head to the side.

“Um. Yeah,” he replies, not wanting to explain because those who aren’t quirkless don’t usually know what it’s like to *be* quirkless, what it means for people to know. How people usually react.

They don't remember when he told Kacchan when they were four, when Kacchan laughed at him and mocked him. They don't remember when his classmates in elementary school found out, when they asked the teacher if that meant Izuku would be a baby forever, and the teacher told them that he'd grow up but he was *fragile* , that they needed to be *careful* . When he entered middle school, when the kids found out from the parents and the internet that it meant he was worthless, too, when the teachers shrugged it off and told him not to provoke it, told him to grow a thicker skin. Quirkless kids are *sensitive* , don't you know? They tend to overreact to these things. Why else would the bullying statistics be so high for a population so small? They're *sensitive* , susceptible to mental illness, too. They shouldn't be trusted with high-stress jobs. They're not fit for normal society.

"Deku?" Uraraka says, and he realizes that she, Iida, Kirishima, Kaminari, and now Ashido and Kacchan too, are all staring at him. He feels moisture on his cheeks and furiously wipes at the tears, scrunching his eyes shut for just a second.

"M-Most people," he says, voice shaky. "Don't think it's, um. B-Badass." He sees Kacchan scowl, sees Ashido make quick eye contact with Kirishima.

"It's okay, dude," Kaminari says, shrugging. "We're not gonna like, make fun of you."

"Yeah," Ashido pipes up. "It'd be like making fun of me for being pink, like you can't control it. It's just kinda awesome that you're the first quirkless hero course student, y'know?"

Izuku nods, his eyes filling with fresh tears, but before he can say anything, a loud bell blares through the mess hall. He glances around to see his classmates looking around in confusion, then hears someone shout,

"It's the infiltration alarm! We've got to get out of here!" And suddenly, students start to stand and push their way to the exit rapidly. Izuku stands up when he sees Iida and Uraraka get out of their seats. He starts for the door, but it's so crowded that it's hard to move.

"Everyone's panicking!" Uraraka gasps, reaching out a hand and grabbing onto Izuku's backpack. "Someone's going to get hurt..."

Izuku nods, biting his lip and trying not to get jostled too terribly much. He looks for Iida, but he's gone, off to the side somewhere. The walkway is hot with body heat and loud with the sounds of voices, the sounds of people panicking. Izuku feels like he's choking, but he tamps that down and thinks about what's happening. *UA has a notoriously strong security system*, he thinks. *If someone broke in, this is bad news* . He looks to the window, the large one to his right, and sees Iida, pushing through the crowd.

"Uraraka!" He shouts, "Float me!" Izuku looks at Uraraka, who blinks and stretches out an arm, trying to reach Iida's outstretched hand. Izuku nudges the person in front of her, and Iida and Uraraka link hands for just a second, then Iida is floating above the crowd.

Izuku watches with wide eyes as Iida uses his quirk to propel himself over the heads of the other students, launching himself straight into the wall in an awkward position, like he's mid-step while running. He takes a deep breath and shouts,

"Everybody calm down! It's just the media! Everything is okay!" loud and clear and straight to the point. The crowd seems to take a collective breath, then slows down, starts to move in a more orderly fashion.

Izuku takes a deep breath and starts forward, slipping away from Uraraka slightly. She catches his

shoulder with one hand and says,

“Deku, where are you going? We can finish lunch if it’s just the media.” Her brows are furrowed as she lets him go and presses her fingers together, releasing her quirk on Iida where he’s moved to float just above the ground. The majority of the crowd seems to be dissipating, going back to their seats as the principal announces something Izuku isn’t listening to, his voice loud and clear over the speakers.

“I’m just going to double check something,” he says, and Uraraka gives him a short nod.

“Be careful, okay?” She says, flashing him a quick smile, and he returns it. She releases his sleeve and he turns, walking out of the lunch room and down the hall quickly.

There are a couple of students and teachers out here, and most of the students seem to be headed back to lunch or gathering in small clumps and talking. Midnight and Cementoss are there, talking to a couple of students, and Izuku sees Ectoplasm helping a student with a bruise on their elbow and dirt on the knees of their uniform. Izuku grimaces sympathetically at that. It’s not surprising that at least one kid got trampled, and Izuku’s honestly just glad there isn’t more. He moves through the crowd quickly, ignoring the way Midnight’s gaze catches on him, tracking him until he turns the corner and marches down the hallway. It’s empty, here, and the shiny tile floor is reflecting the light pouring through the windows. Izuku can hear the talking, from down the hall, but it’s finally quiet enough for him to hear his own footsteps. He takes a deep breath.

The thing is, Izuku knows UA is the best of the best. And while it’s certainly *possible* that it was just the media, that there’s some crazy reporter with some crazy quirk, it’s also just as possible that this is something more. He can feel it, a twinge in his gut, and if he learned one thing as a vigilante, it was to trust his instinct. So, he pushes open the door to outside and steps onto the sidewalk.

There are police officers and pro heroes, both from the school and not, herding a crowd of what definitely *looks* like reporters back out of the gate. Izuku stares for a moment, watching the cameras and microphones the reporters have with them shining in the bright midday sun, before he realizes-- the *gate*. The giant, metal gate that forms a part of the UA barrier-- it isn’t there. He looks at the rest of the perimeter and sure enough, the barrier is activated there, dark iron metal contrasting against the clear blue sky. But the gate isn’t. Izuku strains to see, squinting, but he can’t make anything out around the reporters, and he knows better than to approach with the teachers and police there.

Well. He knows better than to approach if he plans on living, anyway. Izuku takes a deep breath and walks toward the wall just to the left of the crowd, stepping off of the sidewalk into the lawn. The grass sways under a light breeze as he walks, skirting the edges of the commotion as much as he can without losing sight of everything. He listens to his own breath, to the low static of the reporters arguing and whining as they’re finally pushed out. He sees the gate, crumbled into dust that’s gathered along the edges of the opening in the barrier, mixed up with dust and footprints but so clearly there, dark iron on the concrete ground. He sucks in a breath, because that *could* be a reporter’s quirk, but reporters are usually so, so careful with quirk usage because they’re hyper aware of its illegality.

“Midoriya.” Izuku nearly jumps out of his skin when he hears his name, and he instinctively jumps into a fighting stance before looking up and seeing Aizawa, standing with his arms crossed over his chest and a look of utter exhaustion on his face.

“Um, y-yes?” Izuku squeaks, quickly dropping the fighting stance, using the motion to take a step back from his teacher.

“What are you doing?” He asks, voice monotone. Izuku tries to figure out if it’s from annoyance or something else, but it’s hard to tell.

“I-I heard someone broke through the, um, the barrier,” he says, looking back behind Aizawa. “A- And I wanted to see how they did it?” It comes out as more of a question, and he sees Aizawa raise a brow, then sigh.

“Get back inside and finish your lunch,” he says, and Izuku nods quickly, turning and walking back towards the building that houses the mess hall. He doesn’t intend on going back to lunch, though. If he can see who does that, who dissolves that wall, well...

Izuku walks into the building, but he makes a detour once inside, headed up the stairs two at a time. He crosses his fingers that nobody catches him, because this is the riskiest place he’s done this. The door to the roof isn’t unlocked, but he didn’t expect it to be. He goes to the top floor and opens a window, stares out. This window faces the back of the school, and there’s nobody out here. It’s only five stories, though, so he dives headfirst just to be sure.

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Izuku opens his eyes on the way to lunch, and it’s disorienting for just a second before he figures out that, oh, he and Iida and Uraraka walked this way to get into the lunch room. He stops walking, puts on a smile, and puts a hand up to the back of his head.

“H-Hey, I’m gonna stop by the bathroom first,” he says, and Uraraka and Iida glance back at him.

“Okay!” Uraraka says, flashing him a thumbs up. Iida nods, and Izuku turns and walks back down the hall, towards the men’s restroom and, conveniently, the exit. He clenches and unclenches his fists as he walks quickly down the hall, feeling his heart rate pick up, like his body knows he’s doing something against the rules. He pushes open the door to the outside, like last time, but this time there’s no obvious crowd blocking the gate. It’s open, but all of the reporters are outside of it like they should be, and they’re not even crowding around it like they were this morning. Izuku can’t make out faces or anything from this distance, though, so he takes the same path as last time, stepping onto the soft grass and listening to his own footsteps. It gives him something akin to *deja vu*, and he smiles at the thought. He has *literally* been here before.

This time, though, when he walks through the neatly kept lawn and steps into the shadow of another building, close enough to see the bolts on the gate and the way rust has just barely started to gather in some of the lines and cracks, where it’s been scrubbed off and the metal has been polish, this time, he isn’t interrupted. He stands and stares at the shiny metal of the gate. They keep it open during the day, usually, in case students need to leave, but because of the media presence, they shut it.

Izuku is maybe twenty feet from the gate, standing between a building that he *thinks* is for the groundskeepers and a tall oak tree, when it happens. It looks like something out of a book, the gate crumbling from a point about as high as Izuku is tall. It starts as a circle that flakes away, iron dust glimmering in the darkness. Izuku watches as the gate breaks and peels and flutters, like old, dry paint on weathered wood, except this is well-kept iron that’s over a foot thick. Izuku swallows, and he stares directly at the man who did it. He’s taller than Izuku, but not by much, and his hair is white, almost blue. He looks at Izuku, makes eye contact with him, and Izuku sees bright, cherry red irises. His face is dry and flaking, like the gate, and Izuku takes a step back on instinct. This person is *dangerous*.

He turns and runs, taking the first step just as the alarm goes off. He squeezes his eyes shut, trying to shake the image of that man’s face, peeling and dry and *wrong* out of his head, and that’s why he

doesn't see whoever it is he runs straight into, probably.

He blinks, taking a step back and opening his eyes only to see Aizawa, of course, standing with his arms folded over his chest (just like last time. just like last time.) and an angry look on his face. He glares at Izuku, points a hand back at the school.

"Get inside and take shelter with everybody else until we figure out what's going on," he orders. "We *will* talk later." And that's enough for Izuku to take off running again, sprinting across the lawn. He doesn't go into the building with the lunch room, though. He goes back to the tall building, the one that he now *knows* kills him if he jumps off of the highest floor.

As he walks, ignoring the shouts of other students and the eventual announcement that it's just the media, he thinks that he needs a better way to do this on campus. Something quick and easy and *private*, so that he won't get interrupted and he won't have to trust that the building is tall enough and that there'll be an open window.

It helps, he thinks as he unlatches the window and swings his feet out. *that I'm not afraid to die*.

He jumps.

--

The next lunch period goes by in a haze, and Izuku doesn't try to break away from the crowd or run. Classes are a blur, too, and he's got a horrible headache that he's pretty sure is from the stress of knowing that a scary person with a terrifying quirk broke into the school, but he can't be totally sure. He gets called on like ten times and gives half hearted, stupid answers, but it's only because he can't stop theorizing about what's going on. Even on his walk home from the train station, with the sun spilling light through the leaves in the trees and onto the sidewalk, he's thinking about it

The villain has some kind of disintegration quirk for sure, something that dissolves or shatters or disassembles, that much is clear. But the real question is if Izuku should warn people, if he should say something about what he saw.

The way Izuku sees it, there are a few ways this could go. One, he could tell them and they don't believe him. They think he's lying, think there's no way he could have the information. That he's making something up for kicks or attention. Two, they could believe him. They could use the information and prepare, just in case. Third, and most likely, they could think he's an enemy. They could find it suspicious, think he's misleading them. Maybe this disintegration guy is a known problem, but a secret one. Maybe knowing will incriminate him, mark him as an ally of the bad guys.

Izuku isn't used to teachers trusting him. He tips his head back as he walks, watching a flock of birds make their way across the sky. It's still clear and blue, but the afternoon light is darker and more saturated than it had been at lunch time. He wonders if Aizawa thought he was a traitor, that last time. Maybe he thought Izuku took down the gate himself.

Izuku thinks, briefly, about going out as Ace tonight, but dismisses the idea. Tomorrow, they have the rescue training thing, and it's apparently a field trip that will take the whole day. He's trying to do well at UA, so he'll need to be fully awake for something like that.

It shouldn't be too hard, really.

--

Izuku watches nervously as Thirteen waves at them. He can't see any kind of facial expression

under her mask, and it's making him jittery. He likes to know what teachers think of him.

"Whoa, it's like Universal Studios Japan," someone whispers from behind him.

"This space was created to allow all kinds of different rescue scenarios and to practice rescue techniques in realistic environments," Thirteen says. "It's called the Unforeseen Simulation Joint!"

It really is USJ, Izuku thinks, a small smile creeping up on his face. He's not sure what he's expecting, really, but after the bus ride here, with his classmates making fun of Kacchan and chatting about the world of heroics, he's a little more relaxed than he'd been yesterday. He takes a deep breath and resolves that even though Aizawa and Thirteen may not like him, he'll make the most of this. It's not like Thirteen has given him any kind of sign that she *doesn't* like him, either.

Izuku watches Aizawa approach Thirteen and ask something under his breath. Izuku wonders what it's about, and then he sees Thirteen shake her head and hold up three fingers.

Is it... All Might's limit? Izuku wonders, briefly, then gives himself a shake. He doesn't even know if the staff at UA know about that. He hasn't exactly talked to All Might about that, not since the day he found out, so he doesn't have a lot of information about it. For all he knows, Thirteen is talking about three cats.

"Alright everyone, before we begin I have one thing to talk about," Thirteen says, and Izuku straightens up. "Or two. Or three."

"I'm sure you've all heard of it," she says, "but my quirk is called Black Hole. It can suck anything up and turn it to dust."

"Yeah!" Izuku says, his excitement getting the best of him. "It's a perfect quirk for removing wreckage and hazards in rescues!" Beside him, he can feel the air move from the sheer force of Uraraka's enthusiastic nodding.

Thirteen nods, the motion barely visible with her helmet. "Right. But it's also a quirk that could easily be used to kill." She looks over the group. "That's the case for all of the quirks here. Please remember that even though quirks are normal in our society, they are dangerous and can seriously hurt people."

"With that said," she continues. "You learned about your quirks' limits with Aizawa-sensei's test, and with All Might's battle training, you got a feel for using your talents in battle. I hope this exercise can be a fresh start! You'll learn to wield your quirks and abilities to help people. You will learn that your quirks exist for that very reason! If anything," Thirteen might look at Izuku, or Izuku might imagine it "the quirks come second. The desire to help others is what makes the hero!"

Thirteen is so cool! Izuku thinks, bouncing on the balls of his feet. He can tell the sentiment is mirrored by his classmates, and he feels energy, quick and warm and happy, building in his chest. Helping people is why he *lives*, why he goes on the streets at night and why he's attending UA as "quirkless." It's why he exists. He knows that this exercise will let him finally, finally get to hone his skills and get better at helping people.

"Alright, first thing's first..." Aizawa says, but he trails off, glancing behind himself. Izuku sees it, too, a swirling dark bloom in the air, a mist that looks heavy and oppressive. He watches it open, like a wound, and he feels his heart drop into his stomach when he sees a too-familiar head of icy white hair push its way through. He sees the hands, capped with gold at the wrists and pale, all over the man's body and head and Izuku thinks that he's going to throw up when he sees a flash of

red in his eyes.

“Huddle together and don’t move!” Aizawa screams, and Izuku doesn’t have to be told twice. He grabs those closest to him and pulls them together, just as Aizawa shouts, “Thirteen! Protect the kids!” He starts forward, like he’s going to fight, and Izuku swallows around the lump in his throat. More people, more villains, pour out of the hole in the sky, filling the ground in front of them.

“Is this like at the entrance exam?” Kirishima asks. “Is this part of the training?”

“It isn’t,” Izuku whispers, just as Aizawa pulls his golden goggles out from under his capture weapon and puts them on, his hair already raising with his quirk.

“Don’t move,” he shouts, “these are *villains!*” And Izuku sees the cloud of mist coalesce, becoming something shaped like a man, with a strange silver piece at his neck and two vague eyes. He sees him tilt his head.

“Number Thirteen and Eraserhead,” he says, his voice low and rumbling. “According to the schedule we stole yesterday, All Might was supposed to be here.” His voice is calm, like this is just another day for him. Maybe it is. Izuku realizes, with horror, that this is why the school was infiltrated yesterday. He wonders if warning the school would have been enough for them to stop this trip.

“After all of the trouble we went to,” the man covered in hands says, his voice rough and dry and uncomfortable. “We even gathered all of these idiots... The symbol of peace... isn’t here?” He hisses like a snake, tilts his head back and looks at them with a single red eye. “I wonder if he’ll show up if we kill some of the kids?”

“Sensei?” Yaoyorozu whispers. “What about the alarm system?”

“We have one,” Thirteen replies, standing between them and the villains. “But...”

“They must have someone with a quirk that disables transmissions,” Todoroki murmurs, and Izuku swallows dryly at the thought. “An isolated building away from the school during a scheduled trip... it may seem out of the question, but they must have some solid objective. This is too carefully planned for it to be anything else.”

Izuku hates it, but Todoroki’s right. The break in yesterday was clearly just the last thing they needed for this; it’s too perfect for it to be just a random attack. He wipes his palms on his sports uniform where they’re sweating.

“Thirteen!” Aizawa shouts. “Complete evacuation procedure. They’re blocking transmissions. Kaminari,” the boy jumps, “try using your quirk to contact the school.” Kaminari freezes, then nods.

Izuku can’t help himself. He says, “Sensei, a-are you really going to try and fight them alone?” He takes a step forward. “Even if you erase all of their quirks, there’s so many of them. Eraserhead’s style is ambush attacks after erasing their quirk-- like this, you’ll be fighting practically quirkless!”

Aizawa glances back at him with that and says, “A hero always has more than one trick up his sleeve.” He takes a deep breath, and Izuku can see his chest rising even with the distance.

“Thirteen, I’m coming on you!” Aizawa jumps, his capture weapon fanning out around him. Izuku watches as Aizawa leaps into the fray, canceling quirks just as villains try to activate them, his capture weapon moving like water between the villains, diving under their legs and tripping them up. Izuku feels a sense of awe fill him.

“Incredible,” he breathes. “I forgot Eraserhead’s speciality was one on group battles...”

“This is no time for analysis!” Iida says from behind him, his voice high pitched with alarm. “We have to evacuate!”

“I’m afraid I can’t allow you to do that,” the mist villain says, all dark and thick and blocking their exit all of a sudden. Izuku jerks back, feels the whole group startle.

“Greetings,” he says, like he’s saying hello to a new friend. “We are the League of Villains. I apologize for the intrusion, but we’ve invited ourselves into UA in order to encounter the symbol of peace. You see,” he eyes narrow, like he’s grinning, “we were hoping we might extinguish him.” His voice sounds like he’s smiling, too, and Izuku shivers, goosebumps rising on his arms.

“Ah, well, it seems plans have been altered,” the villain sighs, the mist over what might be his shoulder shrugging. “This is my role.”

The villain begins to swell, to expand, but Izuku blinks and suddenly there’s Kacchan and Kirishima, both throwing punches at the villain. Kacchan’s face is twisted into a nasty grin, and Izuku can see Kirishima’s arm, hard and crackly from his quirk.

“Hah!” Kacchan crows, an explosion bursting from his hand and into the villain. “I bet you didn’t think we’d act before you even moved!”

The two land in fighting stances, facing the villain, but Thirteen pushes in front of them, shoves them back. “You two, get back!”

“That was quite perilous,” the villain says, chuckling. “It’s hard to remember that even if you are students, you are the golden eggs of hero society.”

“Run!” Thirteen screams, bloodcurdling and loud, and Izuku sees the villain swell and expand, a dark swirling mist that quickly overtakes them.

Izuku raises his arms, tries to block his face, but it doesn’t matter. The mist doesn’t hurt, doesn’t feel like anything other than a sharp, twisting wind. His eyes shut without his permission from the force of it, but it stops as quickly as it started, and he blinks to find himself bathed in daylight in *midair*.

He can’t help but squeak in surprise, looking below him to see water. *The flood zone?* He thinks, then braces himself. Hitting the water *hurts*, but his uniform protects him from the worst of it, and it’s lukewarm when he sinks into it. *Warping*, he thinks. *It’s no wonder they got in. His quirk is warping!*

He beats at the water with his hands, orienting himself so that he’s upright. He cracks one eye open, blinking at the sting of the salt water, and then he blanches, a bubble of air escaping his mouth as he jerks back. In front of him, a villain with a clearly shark-based quirk is grinning a mouthful of razor sharp teeth. He watches the villain twist in the water, propelling itself at him, and he clenches his teeth in anticipation. If he dies, maybe he’ll get sent back far enough to warm someone. He can only hope.

He sees a blur of something dark green swoop down from above, and in a flurry of bubbles, the villain is knocked deeper into the water. Izuku blinks as the figure-- Asui-- shoots out a long, pink tongue that wraps tightly around his waist. He doesn’t even have a moment to process before he’s yanked out of the water, Asui’s tongue flicking him up onto something hard and warm.

He blinks, pulling himself up on what must be the deck of a ship, watching Asui pull herself and

Mineta over the railing. They're both drenched, but her hero costume is clearly made to be wet, shedding the excess water easily. She dumps Mineta on the deck, then stands on it herself.

"Well," she says, "it looks like we're in a bit of a pickle."

Chapter End Notes

thank you for all of the nice comments!! reading them honestly makes my day! i have so much planned for usj that it's defo going to be at LEAST 3 chapters, if not more! ive spent a ton of time planning it so i hope it's fun to read!

usj (part 2)

Chapter Summary

last time: izuku has been transported to the flood zone! could this be the work of the weird dry looking dude? almost certainly!

Chapter Notes

tell me why does it feel like this chapter is super short but it's actually nearly 6k words.... anyway this arc is SO FREAKIN FUN to write, especially since... well, you'll see ;)

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“Well,” Asui says, “it looks like we’re in a bit of a pickle.” She reaches up, squeezing water out of her long hair. Izuku reaches up and wipes saltwater from his face with the sleeve of his sports uniform.

“Thanks, Asui, you really saved us there,” he says, blinking the salt out of his eyes. They’re on the deck of a ship in what he assumes is the flood zone, and the surface he’s standing on is some kind of mock-wood made of textured plastic. It’s warm from the bright sun. The water surrounding them reflects the light as it ripples, moving as something underneath the surface swims.

“Call me Tsuyu,” she croaks. Izuku swallows, watching as a dozen heads rise above the surface of the water, watching them.

“Yesterday’s break-in wasn’t just the media,” he says, taking a step away from the edge of the ship. “It was a ploy to get information.”

Asui--no, Tsuyu--nods, but it’s Mineta who pipes up, pushing himself off of the deck and shivering. “T-They can’t kill All Might, though, right? That’s impossible. One All Might gets here, he’ll wipe the floor with them!”

Tsuyu’s mouth flattens into a line. “Mineta,” she says. “I don’t think they’d do something like this if they didn’t have a solid plan to kill him. They must have something they could use to kill him.”

Izuku hates it, but she’s right. He remembers that rooftop on the day that his life changed, the red angry scar on All Might’s stomach. He doesn’t know what the villains know-- not yet, anyway-- but he does know that All Might is painfully, painfully mortal. His quirk is powerful, and he’s strong, but he can be killed.

“If All Might does come, will he be alright?” Tsuyu asks, glances out at the villains watching them from the water. One of them, the shark guy that almost got Izuku when he first teleported here, is grinning a wide smile with too many teeth.

“M-Midoriya,” Mineta says, voice shaky with fear. He grabs onto Izuku’s pant leg and points at

the shark villain.

“Get back here you little rat!” The villain snarls, rearing his head back and laughing. “I’ll kill you!”

Izuku bites his lip, thinking. All Might is an obvious target for villainy in general, but the problem is that not many villains would stand a chance. He’s the symbol of peace, who dissuades villains just by existing, for a reason; he’s difficult to beat. If the villains are targeting him, is it because of his status as the symbol of peace? Or is it for some other reason? Izuku thinks about All Might’s secret, his scar. Could that be done by somebody like the man covered in hands? If someone’s insides were dissolved like that gate, would it make a scar like that, twisted and sunken in and angry?

“Midoriya,” Tsuyu says. “You’re mumbling.”

Izuku blinks, jumps a little. “Sorry!” He takes a breath. “If they’re going to try to kill All Might, if they have a plan to kill him, well... we need to fight back, right?” He gives them what he hopes looks like a determined smile, and he tries to hide the way his hands are shaking. Tsuyu and Mineta look back at him, Tsuyu with a determined set to her face and Mineta with a cast of fear over his, but it’s enough for Izuku.

“How on earth are we supposed to do that?!” Mineta moans, shaking his head. “If they’re here to kill All Might, we won’t stand a chance!”

“Look at the villains,” Izuku says. “They’re all suited to underwater combat, right? So they knew the layout of the USJ, but they sent Asui,” He glances at Tsuyu, “um, Tsuyu here even though she’s best suited for this area. So, they probably don’t know *our* quirks.”

“That makes sense,” Tsuyu says, ribbiting. “They’re not boarding the ship, either. If they had intel about us, they probably wouldn’t be so careful.”

Izuku nods. “It means they’re not underestimating us, though, so we need to be careful as well.”

“N-None of that matters if we can’t win, though!” Mineta says, putting one hand on one of the balls on his head. “My quirk is basically useless, and Midoriya d-doesn’t even *have* one.”

“So?” Tsuyu says, giving him a look. “Midoriya knows how to fight, ribbit. I can leap super high and manipulate my tongue. I can also swim well and empty my stomach contents out of my mouth.”

“I-I can take these balls off of my head and stick them to things! Depending on how I’m feeling, they can stick all day. Oh, and they don’t stick to me,” Mineta says, demonstrating by pulling one of the shiny purple balls off and sticking it to the ship.

Izuku nods. “Mineta’s right that me being quirkless puts us at a disadvantage here,” he says, glancing at the villains watching them from the water. They seem to have gotten closer, if only by a little bit. “But I think I have an idea. Mineta, how many of those can you produce?”

“A-A lot,” he says, pulling one off his head with a pop. Izuku watches another grow to replace it, almost immediately. “But if I make too many, I’ll bleed.”

Izuku nods. “Okay, I want you to throw a whole bunch of them into the water. Tsuyu, can you come with me? I need to find something heavy. *Really* heavy.” Tsuyu just nods, and Izuku’s grateful for it.

“You’re leaving me here?” Mineta squeaks, pulling two balls off of his head and tossing them into

the water. Izuku notes the way the villains flinch away from them. *They can't hear us talking up here*, he realizes.

"It's just for a second, Mineta," he says, giving him a smile. "We'll be right around the corner."

Tsuyu nods. "Your role is really important, ribbit. We're counting on you."

Mineta nods back, tears welling up in his eyes. "O-Okay! I'll do my best!" And he turns toward the water, throwing a volley of dark violet orbs into the churning water below. Izuku turns towards the cabin of the ship and jogs toward it, Tsuyu's footsteps following behind him.

"So what's your plan?" She asks as he tries the door to the cabin, thankfully finding it unlocked.

"I want to try to stick them all together," he says, stepping into the cabin, dark and hard to see as his eyes adjust. "But we'll need some way to draw them all together, and all I can think of is trying to drop something heavy enough to make all the water rush to one spot."

"Hmm," Tsuyu says, stepping past him to open a cabinet. "Wouldn't it work better to make them do it themselves?"

"What do you mean?" Izuku asks, opening a crate on the floor. It's hard to see much, but the cabin seems to mostly be storage rather than something intended to have passengers. There's more faux-wood floor and a number of cabinets and crates inside, along with an anchor and lots of rope. It smells too clean to be a real ship, like plastic and cedarwood, not salt and grime.

"Well," she says. "They're after us, right? They'd all move to the same spot if one of us is in the water."

Izuku shakes his head furiously. "No, that's too risky. Plus, if any of them have long ranged attacks, they won't approach us in the first place." He sifts through the cans in the crate, lifting one up to read the description. It's in english, though, and he isn't familiar with the words. It has some kind of warning label on it, though, something with a skull and crossbones and a flame. He squints at the label in the darkness, trying to make out any words he knows.

"What's that?" Tsuyu asks, reaching into the crate and taking out another canister.

"I'm not sure," Izuku replies, looking up at her as she examines the label. "I don't know that word."

"It's kerosene, ribbit." She looks back into the crate. "There was an oil lamp in the cabinet. It's probably for that."

Izuku blinks, because he *knows* what to do with flammables. Kerosene floats on water, right? It doesn't matter if it'll light the water, either, as long as the villains *think* it will. They'll avoid it, clustering together if they have to to stay safe. If the water is already full of Mineta's quirk, it'll make them stick together, locking them in place.

"Good idea," Tsuyu says, staring at him, and Izuku flushes.

"W-Was I saying all that out loud?" He asks, picking up another can of the kerosene.

"Yes," Tsuyu replies. She looks into the crate. "There are only four cans, ribbit. The rest of this is just mineral oil, which won't burn." Izuku looks in the crate and realizes that she's right; the rest of the cans have different text on them, with slightly different colors on the label. They look to be orange and red, but he can't really tell in the dim light.

“It doesn’t really matter,” he says. “If we pour the kerosene on the water, it’ll smell like gas anyway, right? The mineral oil will float and look just like the kerosene, so the villains have no way of knowing it’s not the same stuff.” He looks at Tsuyu and grins. “We’re not going to actually set it on fire. We just have to make them think we are.”

Tsuyu nods, setting her bottle down in the crate and lifting the whole thing up. “It wouldn’t be very heroic to set them all on fire anyway, ribbit. Even if they deserve it.”

Izuku lets out a little laugh and nods, walking back out of the cabin. Tsuyu follows behind him, and he can see Mineta out on the deck, blood running down the back of his head.

“Mineta!” Izuku calls. “Are you alright?” He picks up his pace, stopping at the railing and looking down into the water. It’s flooded with Mineta’s orbs, the violet blobs floating and bobbing in the dark water. The villains are avoiding them like they’re bombs, looking uneasily up at Izuku and Mineta.

“I-I’m trying my best!” Mineta says, and Izuku realizes he’s crying a little. “I’m not going to be outdone by you two!”

Izuku nods, because as weird as Mineta is, he’s integral to this plan. Izuku shows Mineta the canister he’s holding. “We’re going to put this in the water,” he says, and Mineta blinks. “It’s flammable, so we can burn the villains.”

“What!?” a villain shouts from the water below. “You’re going to *what?*!” Izuku resists the urge to smile as the villains start shouting at each other.

“It’s probably a bluff,” the one with the shark face says, rolling his eyes. Izuku can see the motion even over the short distance. “What would they have on that fake ship that burns, anyway?”

“Kerosene,” Izuku says, holding out the bottle so the english label is turned towards them. “And if you think you’re bluffing,” he says, unscrewing the top of the bottle slowly, the metal lid making a satisfying scraping noise as he does, “come and see for yourself.” He hands the opened bottle to Tsuyu, who nods and takes it in her tongue, sticking the organ out and whipping it through midair, above the villains’ heads. The kerosene sprays out in a fan-like shape, and the villains all seem to swim backwards and away from it, the water churning and mixing. Where the kerosene lands, it glistens in rainbow colors, like an oily puddle on a sidewalk.

“Get away from it!” One of the villains shouts, swimming furiously back. “If you have gills, that stuff’s bad news!” He backpedals in the water, backing right up into three of Mineta’s orbs where they’ve clustered together. Izuku watches as a look of realization comes over the villain’s face and he jerks to the side, running into a villain with crab claws.

“Hey!” He growls, turning to face the villain who’s now stuck to his left claw. “Watch where you’re going, punk!” The villain swings a claw at the other villain, slapping him in the face.

Tsuyu nudges him in the side with an elbow. “I’m going to do another one, ribbit.” She angles her head to the left, where the villains are still mostly unclumped. The center of the group seems to be the most disorganized, quickly getting themselves all stuck together in a great violet mass.

Izuku nods, and reaches down for the second bottle of kerosene. He opens it and passes it to her. This time, her tongue flicks out over the water and dumps the fluid in a neat line, forcing the villains on the far side of the group to dodge towards the center, smashing them into each other. Izuku quickly loses track of any individual villain; between the foam of the water, the flailing limbs, and Mineta’s balls, they’re nearly impossible to keep an eye on. It’s not all of them; a few

stray villains seem to have avoided the kerosene and the balls, but at this point, most of Mineta's quirk seems to have clumped up with the villains in the center. Izuku takes a deep breath.

"I think that's as good as we're going to get," he says, looking to Tsuyu. "Can you get us out of here?"

"I think so," she croaks. "Hold on tight. I'll need my tongue to launch us, so I'll have to hold you two with my arms." Izuku nods, reaching forward to grab onto her left arm. He feels a little awkward pressing himself into her, her body cool and damp from the water or maybe her quirk. Mineta seems to have no such qualms; he practically launches himself into her.

"Ready?" She asks. Mineta nods, and Izuku hums his agreement. Tsuyu flicks her tongue out and jumps, the pink appendage wrapping around the railing of the ship as she crouches and leaps. Izuku watches, his head turned to see the way she uses her tongue to launch them higher once they're in the air, sending them sailing over the water.

"This is amazing!" He shouts, barely audible over the sound of the wind rushing past them. "You can practically fly!"

"It's very limited, ribbit!" Tsuyu shouts back. "I can't control my trajectory midair." Izuku glances below them, at the dark water. A little ways back, he sees the mass of villains, still struggling to break free. He trails his gaze over the water, stopping when he sees their shadow.

"Oh no," he breathes, and he doesn't think the others hear him but it doesn't matter. In the water below, a villain is chasing after them, his octopus-like tentacles whipping through the water. Izuku swallows, realizing that they're slowly losing altitude; soon, they'll be in his range.

"Tsuyu!" He shouts, looking up at her.

"What is it?" She replies, glancing back down at him. Her eyes widen for a second, and Izuku knows she sees what he did.

"When I let go," he says. "Don't try to catch me!" He can see it already, sooner than he expected-- a gray tentacle, shooting up from the water below them, reaching for Izuku's ankle. He's the lowest down of all three of them, what with Mineta and Tsuyu both being shorter than him and all of their heads being at roughly the same height.

"Midoriya, don't!" She replies, but it's too late. Izuku feels something strong and wet wrap around his ankle, and he releases his grip on Tsuyu before the tentacle can jerk him downward, yanking him out of her grasp. He hears Mineta scream as he falls, and he can only hope that they make it to land okay. He can't tell if they're falling any faster, given the speed at which he's plummeting to the water.

He remembers reading, somewhere, that if you fall from high enough up, water feels just like concrete. He isn't sure if it's just that he wasn't quite that high, or if that's a myth, but hitting the water doesn't knock him out or kill him immediately. It sends pain through his ankles and knees at the moment of impact, knocks his breath out of his lungs, sure, but he's still conscious when he's dragged under the water. He opens his eyes, grimacing at the saltwater, then promptly shuts them again as a tentacle wraps around his chest, squeezing all of the air out of him. He tries to scream as it wraps tighter, as something in his chest cracks and *burns*, but he's out of air. He isn't sure if he's drowning, or if that's just the feeling of being crushed.

He's grateful when his vision slips into blackness.

When he opens his eyes, he's praying that he'll see the classroom or the bus or even the outside of the USJ, but what covers his vision is that thick, dark mist. He swallows, feeling a pit of dread in his stomach as the world rematerializes around him, and he braces for the fall into water, but instead finds himself surrounded by heat and light. He blinks, turning to see what has to be the conflagration zone, with red and orange flames curling up around simulation buildings, empty shells of concrete and iron.

"Midoriya!" He turns to see Yaoyorozu, a sheen of sweat already on her skin. She runs toward him, her hand on her stomach as she makes something with her quirk. He feels something like despair inside of him because this isn't what happens. It's him and Tsuyu and Mineta in the flood zone, not him and Yaoyorozu in this place.

It hits him like a ton of bricks, and he breathes, "It's *random*," and it doesn't matter that Yaoyorozu blinks at him like he's grown a second head. "They don't know our quirks. It's not predetermined. It's random." He looks down, stares at his hands. His quirk sends him back in time, but he's always just assumed everything except for him was *constant*. He didn't think that it'd be like this, that the random things were still random, that he'd be thrown into a completely different situation. His hands are shaking.

"What do you mean?" Yaoyorozu asks, pulling a mask from her stomach. "Here, put this on." She hands it to him. "For the smoke."

Izuku nods, putting it on. "I-I don't think they know our quirks," he says, strapping it into place. "They obviously know all of their own quirks, so we can expect to see some guys with fire related quirks here, but they don't know ours."

Yaoyorozu bites her lip, her brows furrowing. "How do you know that?"

Izuku blinks, swallows. "I-If they knew," he says, glancing around. "Wouldn't Ts- um, Asui be here too? She'd be vulnerable to fire."

Yaoyorozu frowns, then nods, putting on her own gas mask. "You're right. If that's the case, we need to get out of this zone as quickly as possible. We're at a huge disadvantage from the environment alone." As if punctuating her point, a piece of concrete breaks away from the rest of the building behind her, the fire crackling and popping when it falls to the ground with a crash. Sparks and embers are knocked upward, and the pile of rubble it creates starts to spew a black smoke.

"I can make fire blankets," she says, fanning her face, "but they're more for smothering small flames..."

Izuku shakes his head. "We can't worry about that right now. We have to get out of here as soon as possible, before the villains in the area come after us."

"Are you sure there's--" Yaoyorozu is cut off as a blast of fire, thick and bright yellow-orange, comes flying at her from behind. Izuku leaps forward, yanking her down and to the side. They land on the hard, hot ground, and Izuku hisses as he rolls off of Yaoyorozu and onto hot embers. He pushes himself up with his elbow, then looks over to see Yaoyorozu getting up as well, only for another burst of hot flame to shoot out at her.

"Get down!" He says, but she's not reacting fast enough. Izuku doesn't know why he does it-- he just reset, he should get more information first-- but he leaps at her, pushing her out of the way of

the blast again. This time, though, he's caught in it, the blaze pushing into his back and legs just as he tries to flatten himself to the ground and get out of its way. There's no force accompanying it, so he isn't blown back, but he catches flame immediately, and he can't help but scream at the pain. He can feel his skin blistering, melting and twisting. Nothing else registers, and Izuku feels himself pushing Yaoyorozu away from him, away from the unnaturally yellow flames that climb around from his back and snake up under his armpits, chasing his throat.

Izuku watches the reflection of the flames in Yaoyorozu's wide, terrified eyes as he burns to death.

--

Izuku knows to expect the mist this time, but it doesn't make the knowledge that he's going into a dangerous situation, one that's already killed him twice, any easier. He squeezes his hands into fists and opens his eyes, watching as the mist clears and suddenly his feet are on solid ground. He blinks, glancing around for fire or water or something, and he sees Ojiro looking at him with a confused look on his face and a pair of gloves and shoes that means Hagakure's here, too.

They're on some kind of a ledge above a sheer cliff that drops maybe twenty or thirty feet, the ground a rugged brown stone. Izuku sees a few tufts of grass poking out from cracks in the rock, stretching up to get at the light. The mountain stretches onward above them, a series of slopes and sheer cliffs and the occasional ledge. Izuku can see two villains already, one clinging to a sheer cliff with his hands and feet like a lizard, the other with her head and shoulders poking out of the rocks like she's swimming in it.

"We're in the mountain zone," Izuku says, looking at Ojiro and Hagakure. "We need to defeat the villains here and get to the central plaza, fast."

Ojiro nods, and Hagakure flashes him a gloved thumbs up. "You take the ones up top," Ojiro says, flicking his tail at them. "I can get the ones coming from the side."

Izuku blinks, casting a quick gaze to their left, and sure enough, he sees at least four villains edging along the ledge towards them. He grits his teeth and hopes that Ojiro knows what he's doing, but he trusts his classmate. When he'd reviewed the tapes from the battle simulation, it had been clear that Ojiro is well trained in combat already, some sort of mixed martial arts that utilizes his tail.

Izuku sees the sticky-hands villain tense for just a moment, and that's all the warning he gets before the villain pops off of the cliff above, leaping down at him. Izuku dodges forward, towards the rock wall, only for the villain swimming through the rock to graze him with a kick aimed at his head. He hisses through his teeth and glances between the two of them, trying to figure out how to hit both at once. As a vigilante, he rarely fights more than one person at once, even more rarely in a setting like this. He's not used to it.

"Hey, Midoriya," a voice whispers in his ear, and Izuku just *barely* stops himself from flinching. "Lure one of them to the edge, okay? I can push them off!" He nods, as subtle as he can, then casts his gaze to where Hagakure had been earlier. Her gloves and shoes are on the ground, sitting on the ledge. He can see Ojiro fighting with a villain that looks to be crusted in thick, dried mud, but he forces himself to focus on the battle he's engaged in.

He slides away from the wall just as the female villain punches from within it, and Izuku spins so that he's facing the villain who'd been stuck to the wall. He can see that villain's blue hair sticking out from under a yellow bandana, and his hands are a bright yellow color, covered in some kind of odd scales. Izuku ducks towards him, feinting at a kick that the villain easily dodges, leaning towards the edge of the ledge. Izuku follows up with a punch, one that doesn't even come close to hitting but makes the villain step back anyway, flipping his head to flick a piece of loose hair out of

his face.

“Jeez, you can't even hit me,” the villain says, rolling his eyes. “I knew y'all were kids, but come--” he cuts off with a scream as suddenly he's toppling over the side of the ledge, rolling down the sheer slope and grasping desperately at the plant life there.

“Oof,” Hagakure says, her voice just a few feet in front of Izuku. “I kinda feel bad for that one.”

“That was *awesome*,” Izuku says, smiling. “But we've got another one to take down.” He turns to face the female villain, her head and shoulders poking out of the rock wall in front of them, then the rest of her body slowly emerging. The rock seems to stick to her, almost like it's a liquid, as she steps out, dropping onto the ground as pebbles. *A liquefaction quirk, then?* Izuku takes a breath, getting into a fighting stance.

“Hagakure,” he whispers, “if she could move through the floor beneath us, she would already be doing that. I don't know *why* she can't, but she probably won't be able to get underneath us.”

“Ten four,” he hears whispered back at him, and he takes a quick step toward the villain, who just raises an eyebrow at him. Her dark brown hair is short, almost a buzzcut, and her clothing is tight to her skin, thick and clearly protective. Her stance speaks of experience fighting, and Izuku swallows as he charges in, sliding at her feet.

“Oh, no you don't!” The villain says, neatly jumping to the side. Izuku pivots to look at her, not waiting before he throws a quick backhand at her face. She blocks it easily with one hand, and Izuku follows up with a knee aimed at her stomach. She grunts when it makes contact, but she doesn't fall. She throws a kick of her own, one that Izuku barely manages to block with his arm, stopping it from hitting the side of his neck.

Suddenly, the villain makes a choking sound and whips around, probably wondering what hit her. Izuku can see the mark on her neck already turning red, and he silently thanks Hagakure as he takes the opportunity to throw a kick into the villain's ribs. It hits, and the villain slides to the side before she catches herself, a hand coming up to press on the injured spot. She whips around to look at Izuku, and Izuku can *see* the imprint of Hagakure's foot where it smacks into the villain's face. The villain's eyes roll back into her head, and she crashes to the ground in a heap.

“Nice one!” Hagakure says. “Let's go help Ojiro!” Izuku nods and turns around, seeing Ojiro fighting a villain with bird wings in place of arms. There are two villains unconscious beside him, and a third missing altogether. Izuku has a feeling if he looked down the cliff, he'd see them down there.

Ojiro knocks the bird guy off of the cliff with a well-timed tail slap, but the bird guy gets himself back onto the ledge with just one quick flap of the wings. Izuku jogs up to them, sliding between Ojiro and the wall to kick the bird villain in the stomach. This guy doesn't seem to have much training, if at all, and he doesn't even try to block it, gasping as the breath is knocked out of him. Ojiro hooks his tail around the guy's back and knocks him in the back of the head, taking advantage of his distraction with Izuku, and the man goes down in a flurry of feathers.

“Thanks for the assist,” Ojiro says, smiling at him. The only sign that he's been in a fight is the sweat at his brow; there's not a single sign of being hit on the guy.

“Y-You're welcome,” Izuku says, blinking. “You're so good at fighting!”

Ojiro shrugs, his cheeks heating up a little as he smiles. “Ah, I've just been practicing for a long time.” He brushes off his top, stepping away from the two unconscious villains. “So, Midoriya,

you said we needed to get back to the central plaza, right?”

Izuku nods. “Right. Um, they’re planning to kill All Might, so they probably have some means to do that. This is too coordinated for them *not* to. So, Aizawa-sensei and Thirteen probably need help.”

Ojiro nods. “Sounds good to me. We should get going before these guys wake up,” he says, pointing his tail back at the unconscious villains. Izuku nods, then looks around for Hagakure.

“Um, Hagakure, you here?” He asks. Her shoes and gloves are still in the same spot, and without any loose sand on the ground, he can’t really look for tracks or anything.

“Yup!” Her voice right beside him startles him, and he jumps. “I should probably put my shoes on before we go.” Izuku hears a few faint footsteps, then the shoes start moving, seemingly on their own. It’s strange, watching the shoes move without anyone moving them, especially when Hagakure ties the laces into a neat bow. The shoes plant themselves firmly on the ground, and the gloves come off the ground, moving strangely as Hagakure puts them on.

“Okay, I’m ready,” she says, giving them two thumbs up. Izuku nods, then glances at Ojiro, who does the same. Izuku turns, looking down the slope and trying to spot footholds. He scans the brown earth, looking at the way it dips and rises in spots, and it clicks.

“It’s the same as buildings,” he says, his voice barely a whisper.

“You climb buildings?” Ojiro asks with a quirk of his brow, and Izuku shakes his head quickly.

“Not much, but I thought it would be a useful skill to try and pick up for heroics,” he replies. “It’s not too far of a drop, and it looks climbable.” He doesn’t say that if he dies falling, he’ll get another chance, but that’s on his mind, too.

“I’ll go last so you two don’t have to worry about knocking rocks down onto me,” Hagakure says, and Izuku blinks. He hadn’t even considered that.

“I’ll go first, then,” Ojiro says. “I have an extra limb, and once I’m down, I can catch either of you if you fall.” Izuku nods, and Ojiro steps towards the ledge, crouching down and lowering himself like he’s climbing down a ladder. In a couple of seconds, his head disappears below the ledge, and Izuku walks up to it, peering down. He sees Ojiro, making quick and steady progress down the slope.

“It’s easier than it looks!” He calls up to them. “I think they designed it with climbing in mind, so nobody would get hurt.”

It makes sense, of course, but Izuku doesn’t let himself breathe out a sigh of relief until Ojiro’s jumping off the last two feet and landing on the ground below the cliff, a patch of bare ground that looks like it surrounds the periment of the mountain zone. Izuku thanks his lucky stars that they teleported near the edge of the mountain zone rather than somewhere harder to climb out of.

“Okay,” he says to himself, sitting down at the edge of the ledge and dangling his feet over the ledge. He takes a deep breath, then turns himself so his stomach is facing the cliff face and his feet are tucking into the first footholds he can see, fairly wide ones that he can stand on easily with the balls of his feet. When he glances down, he thinks he can see the next place to step, and he moves his left foot down carefully, biting his lip and lowering himself. He realizes that Ojiro’s right; this is easier than it would be in nature, certainly easier than trying (and failing, mostly) to scale buildings. He lowers himself one step at a time, loose pebbles crunching softly under his shoes as

he climbs down. It's hard to see exactly where he's putting his feet, and it's nervewracking every time he has to move his hands down, but before he knows it, he feels Ojiro's tail supporting his back.

"You can jump down, now," Ojiro says. "It's only a couple more feet." Izuku nods, then jumps. The sensation is strange. Usually, when he jumps off of things, he doesn't land on the ground moments after, alive and on his feet. He blinks. It's oddly disorienting to be alive.

"I'm coming down now!" Hagakure calls, and Izuku steps back from the wall, turning back to look at it even though he knows he won't see much of anything. There's the occasional falling rock, the occasional spray of dust, and of course her gloves and shoes, moving from foothold to foothold neatly, like they're not carrying any weight at all. It seems quicker than when he went down, but then again, so had Ojiro's descent. Izuku thinks it must feel slower when you're the one on the cliff, when you're the one in danger.

Hagakure hops onto the ground before Ojiro gets a chance to help her out, and for just a second, her gloves wave in the air like she's trying to catch her balance. Ojiro's tail, sleek and smooth, whips out and steadies her, resting on what Izuku thinks is her shoulder. He sees the motion of her gloves pause, one of them coming to rest on Ojiro's tail.

"Thanks!" She chirps, and Ojiro nods, saying,

"No problem. Let's get going." He removes his tail, wrapping it around his own shoulders, out of the way. Izuku nods, following Ojiro as he starts to walk forward, out of the mountain zone.

Chapter End Notes

when u've been forgetting content warnings...
cw: just the normal stuff, plus mineta. oh, and fire.

i hope u enjoyed!!! ive been DYING to write the different zones, and ever since i had the idea about random events not being locked in with his quirk, i knew what i'd be doing for USJ :3 i hope my ojiro and hagakure aren't too ooc-- there's not a lot of them in canon to work from! i like writing the less known classmates, tho

thank u again for all for the support!!!

usj (part 3)

Chapter Summary

last time: izuku survives the mountain zone with ojiro and hagakure

Chapter Notes

:3 this is the last part of this arc!! ive been dying to write this, so i hope it's fun to read!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Izuku steps forward, around the fence that surrounds the landslide zone. The sounds of fighting are loud now that they're close to the central plaza, and he clenches his teeth. Ojiro, in front of him, suddenly freezes, taking a step back.

"Ojiro?" Izuku asks, picking up his pace and stepping closer to him.

"Sensei...." Ojiro's face is twisted in horror, and Izuku feels his heart sinking as he follows his gaze across the ground, to a crumpled body, broken and twisted under a strange creature.

Aizawa is bleeding from one arm, and both of them are clearly broken, the beast on top of him a strange black thing with a long, shining beak and eyes that bulge out slightly. The creature's brain is exposed, glistening sickly in the light, pulsing and pale. Aizawa's goggles, bright gold, are lying in the dust, cracked and broken. Izuku can see his hair, damp with dark liquid, tangled in the dust. Izuku swallows.

"No..." Hagakure whispers, her gloved hands wringing together.

"Hagakure," Izuku says, quietly. "Take your gloves and shoes off and sneak out. Get help."

"B-But," she says, her voice wobbly and wet. "Aizawa-sensei, he's--"

"He's not dead," Izuku says firmly. "Look, he's breathing." He tips his head toward where Aizawa is lying, his chest rising and falling too fast to be healthy, but it proves he's alive and Izuku will take it.

"Okay," Hagakure says, one glove dropping to the ground. "Okay."

"Midoriya, we need to get out of here, too," Ojiro says, his eyes glued to Aizawa as the teacher raises his head, struggling against the creature's grasp. The thing's hands are bigger than Aizawa's skull, and Izuku can hear its breathing from here, ragged and loud and *wrong*.

Izuku shakes his head. "Y-You run," he whispers. "Go to one of the other zones, find shelter." The man covered in hands, standing off to the side, approaches Aizawa and the monster.

"Eraserhead," he rasps, grinning under the hand on his face. "You can erase quirks, huh? A pretty impressive ability, but," he reaches up a hand, scratches idly at his neck. "Faced with

overwhelming strength, you may as well be quirkless.” He tips his head slightly, and the beast crushes Aizawa’s upper arm in one hand, the snap sickening and loud. Izuku feels bile rise in his throat, and he swallows down the urge to gag.

“I’m not leaving if you’re not,” Ojiro says, and Izuku just nods, his mouth too dry for him to speak. He watches the creature, huge and terrible, pull Aizawa’s head up off the ground. His teacher’s eyes, wide and red with his quirk, briefly meet Izuku’s and Izuku wonders if he’s imagining the pure fear there. Aizawa grunts, struggling for just a moment, then the creature slams his head into the ground, cracking and splintering the concrete underneath him. Izuku covers his mouth to smother the scream that wants to climb out. Aizawa doesn’t move, and Izuku sees dark blood leaking out from where he lies, still on the ground, breathing but just *barely* .

That black mist starts to materialize behind the hand villain, spilling out into the air like ink dropped in water. The hand villain turns.

“Kurogiri,” he says. “Then Thirteen is dead?”

“I incapacitated her for now,” Kurogiri replies, and Izuku wonders if Aizawa is what they mean by *incapacitated* or if Thirteen is in even worse shape. “But one of the students has a speed quirk, and he was able to evade my capture. The other students impeded my attempts to stop him, and thus he was able to escape with his life.” *Iida!* Izuku thinks, a bright spark of hope flaring in his chest because he remembers, vaguely, that first time through, where Iida and Shouji dove to the side. *If they aren’t transported at all*, he thinks, taking a shaky breath, *it isn’t random! Iida escapes, so we just need to survive long enough for help to arrive. We just need to survive.*

“What?” Ojiro whispers, throwing a confused glance back at Izuku, and Izuku bites his lip, shaking his head.

“It’s nothing,” he whispers back, cursing his habit of mumbling. He looks at the villain covered in hands, watches as the edge of his expression, barely visible, shifts into something dark and ugly.

“Huh?” He says, reaching a hand up to his neck, another to his cheek. He folds over just a bit, scratching furiously. Izuku can see one of his eyes, wide open and angry. “If you weren’t our way out,” he hisses, “I would dissolve you right now. There’s no doubts that if pros arrive, we’ll be in trouble.” He groans, low and keening, like he’s in pain. “It’s game over... It’s game over for now.” He pulls his hands away from his neck, and Izuku can see red blood welling up, spreading through the cracking, dry skin.

“We’ll leave, then.” He says, straightening up and dropping his hands back to his sides. Something about the way he says it, so simply and so plainly, sets Izuku on edge.

“They’re leaving?” Ojiro asks, barely more than a breath.

“I hope so, but...” Izuku swallows. “It’s a little odd, isn’t it?” Ojiro nods, and Izuku sees his tail curl tighter around his shoulders, like he’s hugging himself. Izuku wishes, briefly, that he could do that, but he settles for taking a deep, steadying breath.

“Before that,” the hand villain says, turning to look directly at them. “Why don’t we kill a couple of kids?” He lunges for them, jerking forward suddenly, but something seems to stop him, the pants on his legs compressing weirdly as he falls, unbalanced. He lands on his hands and knees on the ground, the earth between his hands cracking and dissolving. The villain whips his head to the side wildly, looking around with blazing red eyes, and Izuku knows *exactly* what just happened.

“I heard that Iida got away,” Hagakure says, somewhere between Izuku and the villain. “And I

couldn't just run, so..."

"Nomu," the villain growls from his place on the ground, his arms shaking with rage. "Kill her." His voice is a raspy, terrible hiss, and Izuku moves without realizing what he's doing, rushing forward.

He can't see Hagakure, but he *can* see the Nomu, that terrible, bird-like beast, as it drops Aizawa and lunges forward, thick saliva dripping from its mouth as it swings wildly at the air. It's that saliva that tells Izuku where Hagakure is when a spray of it stops strangely in air, like it's caught on something invisible. Izuku thinks he knows where she is, trapped between the hand villain on the ground and the Nomu lunging for her, and he doesn't even have to consider it when he shoves her out of the way of the attack.

The Nomu's punch hits Izuku in the ribs, just under his raised arm, and he hears rather than feels them break, a series of quick, wet crunches that reverberate through his body. He feels foamy blood rise from his throat when he lands on the ground and tries to gasp in air. It doesn't work, and his chest feels heavy and full, like someone's standing on him. He watches, through half-open eyes, as Aizawa hauls himself up where he's lying on the ground, and his last thought before passing out is *thank goodness, he can save Ojiro and Hagakure.*

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Izuku opens his eyes in the black mist, his head pounding with pain, hot and dry and thick. He lands on his knees, and he knows he's back in the conflagration zone from the heat surrounding him, from the hot lick of fire against his skin. He gives himself a shake and stands up, squinting against the brightness of the heat while his eyes adjust.

"Dude, you okay?" Izuku sees Kaminari staring at him, standing a couple of feet away on a piece of relatively unburned piece of concrete. He's got a hand on the earpiece he has, and Izuku can see some bright sparks flickering between the device and his hand.

"Y-Yeah," he says, straightening up. "We need to get out of here, there are villains with fire quirks hiding." He brushes his hands off on his pants, forcing himself to breath evenly. His head is aching, and he wonders if it's from the bright light around him or just from stress.

"Whoa, really?" Kaminari says, glancing around. "We'd better run, then. I'm not great in combat." He raises a hand and starts to fan his face. "Plus, I think this place would be dangerous even without villains."

"What do you mean you're not good in combat?" Izuku grabs the sleeve of his uniform and pulls, ripping off a long strip of fabric. He can't make gas masks like Yaoyorozu did, but this will have to be enough. "Wrap this around your nose and mouth, to block the smoke." He holds it out. The light from the flames makes strange patterns on Kaminari's face, like a puppet show of red and gold.

Kaminari blinks, taking the piece of fabric and wrapping it around his head, tying it in the back. "Thanks, dude," his voice is slightly muffled by the fabric. "And I can't, like, control my electricity. I can either have it on myself or just discharge everywhere, so it'd hit you too." Izuku nods, ripping another piece of fabric off of his other sleeve and tying it over his face. It's tight and uncomfortable, not at all like his vigilante mask, really, but it still feels comforting and familiar.

"Let's just run, then," Izuku says, starting in the direction he knows the central plaza is in. "The villains will have the advantage here, so it's best if we get out of the fire."

"Okay, I agree, but how do you know all of this?" Kaminari starts following Izuku, stepping

around flaming debris and jogging a little to keep up.

“I just do,” Izuku says, shaking his head. He knows he should try and come up with a better excuse, but his head feels wrong, painful and fuzzy. He thinks it must be from the smoke; doesn’t fire make carbon monoxide? They need to get out of here, before it gets worse. Izuku feels like he hasn’t slept in days, like his head is going to burst.

“I dunno, I don’t feel anything like that,” Kaminari says, and Izuku realizes that *again*, he’s been mumbling aloud. “Did you hit your head when the warp guy transported you? You seemed kinda out of it when we first got here, too.”

“I don’t think so,” Izuku says, but he frowns. He doesn’t have time to worry about this right now, but this is the most times he’s ever reset in such quick succession. He can’t think about this right now though, not knowing that Aizawa is fighting for their lives already.

“Oh, running away?” A voice, young and female, speaks from Izuku’s left, and he grits his teeth and dodges as a blast of that familiar yellow fire comes out from being a burning building. The villain, a woman in her twenties with braided black hair and dark skin, raises a hand wreathed in those same flames.

“Kaminari,” Izuku hisses, picking up his pace. “Don’t get hit. That fire’s not normal, it’s *sticky* or something.” He reaches down as he runs, wrapping his hand under a piece of iron rebar that sticks up from the ground. It takes him a moment, a precious second, but he rips it free from the burnt concrete it’s half embedded in. The heat clinging to the metal singes his palms, but he doesn’t let himself slow down.

“Gah!” Kaminari yelps, and Izuku glances back to see him jumping over a fiery blast aimed at his feet. “You weren’t kidding about the villains, huh!?”

“Nope,” Izuku growls, turning back and tossing the long piece of metal rebar through the air at Kaminari. “Use this!” He says, turning to run again the second he sees Kaminari catch it in a gloved hand.

“Smart!” Kaminari says, and Izuku doesn’t have to look back to see the burst of yellow light and hear the sizzle of energy. He can only pray it took down the villain as he keeps running, listening to Kaminari’s footsteps behind him.

“Do you think there are more?” Kaminari asks, and Izuku bites his lip.

“I don’t know,” he says, keeping running as Kaminari draws even with him. “But this zone is the most dangerous, so it makes sense they’d send the least number here.”

“Ah jeez, should we go help everyone in the other zones?” Kaminari says, his face twisted with worry. “They could be in trouble.”

Izuku shakes his head. “Aizawa-sensei needs our help more. He can’t hold out against that many enemies for so long, not alone.” He jumps over a piece of rubble that sticks out from the ground.

“Okay,” Kaminari says, his voice hesitant. “I dunno where you’re getting all this information, but...” He shrugs, and Izuku feels a pang of guilt.

“I’ll explain when this is all over,” he says, knowing full well that he likely won’t make it to the end of this, not if it’s like his other runs. Mentally, he apologizes to Kaminari, praying that eventually, he can make it up to him.

Izuku steps forward, around a small pile of rubble, and he sighs in relief when he sees the end of the conflagration zone, the pavement that makes up the ground between the zones stretching out in front of them. Izuku steps onto it, turning back to see Kaminari stepping out of the fiery mess, pulling his makeshift mask off of his face and using it to wipe sweat from his brow.

“Wow, it feels cold out here by comparison,” Kaminari says, and Izuku agrees. His skin feels irritated and hot from the flames, but the air here feels soft and cool.

“It does,” Izuku says then starts walking. “Let’s go! Aizawa-sensei is counting on us.”

“Right!” Kaminari says in response, catching up with Izuku and keeping pace with him. Izuku sees the scene ahead, and it’s different than last time, different enough that for a moment he’s struggling to place whether it’s before or after. Then, he sees Aizawa, in a fighting stance with his goggles on and intact as he yanks on his capture weapon and it tightens around the throat of a villain who reaches their arms up to try and get free. *We made it before he got injured*, he thinks, breathing a sigh of relief and picking up his pace.

He sees Aizawa dodge out of reach as the hand-covered villain swipes at him, his capture weapon fluttering in the air. Izuku grits his teeth as he watches them fight.

“Sensei!” Izuku shouts as he runs towards them. “He’s got a disintegration quirk. Don’t let him touch you!” He doesn’t see Aizawa react, but Izuku’s sure he heard because when the hand villain lunges for him again, he dodges further back, completely avoiding the attack rather than blocking, even though that would have been easier.

“Oh, who’s this?” The villain says, looking over at Kaminari and Izuku. “Some of your brats, Eraserhead?”

“Who are you?” Izuku shouts, ignoring the way Kaminari is nervously whispering for him to shut up. “Why are you trying to kill All Might?” Izuku stops walking about thirty feet from the villain and Aizawa, standing firm.

“We’re the League of Villains,” hand guy says, turning to look at him. “And I’m Shigaraki Tomura. If you haven’t heard of us before, well, soon *everybody* will know us as the ones who destroyed the symbol of peace.” He laughs, hopping to the side when Aizawa attacks him with a kick. “Careful, Eraserhead. You’re pretty cool, but even you have to blink eventually, hm?” Shigaraki whips a hand out, lightning quick, and it contacts Aizawa’s shoulder. The fabric there starts to decay and flake, and Izuku hears Aizawa hiss in pain, but the disintegration ends as quickly as it began. *He’s erasing it*, Izuku thinks with relief. *We might stand a chance, with Aizawa’s quirk.*

“And to answer your earlier question, Eraserhead,” Shigaraki says, jumping back with an eerie smile on his face. “I’m not the most dangerous one here. No, that would be *him*.”

Shiragaki gestures with both hands. “Nomu! Come and kill Eraserhead for me, will you?” He shouts, and that horrible, giant beast from last run lurches to its feet from behind the unconscious bodies of some villains, heaped up where Aizawa must have taken them down. Izuku swallows down his fear as it rears up, charging towards Aizawa. It moves like it’s a little unbalanced, like its limbs are too heavy for its body, but Izuku knows what will happen if Aizawa fights it. He remembers the image of his teacher, bloody and broken on the ground. He can’t let that happen.

“No!” He shouts, propelling himself forward and into the path of the Nomu’s attack. He knows to block with his limbs this time, to not let it hit his chest, and so he catches the punch with his forearms in the best block he can muster mid-leap. He feels the bones in his arms snap like twigs,

and he bites his tongue to avoid screaming as he's sent flying onto the ground, sliding across the pavement before stopping just a few feet in front of Aizawa.

"Midoriya, what the hell are you doing!?" Aizawa growls, putting a hand on his shoulder. "Fuck," he says, seeing Izuku's arms, bent in the wrong places and already turning a violent red-purple color. "I'll get you out of here, just *stay down* and don't do that again," he says, voice barely more than a low whisper. Izuku blinks through the pain, thinking that it's kind of odd for Aizawa to say that, given that the man hates Izuku, but he pushes it out of his mind.

"R-Run," Izuku says. "G-Get out of here... It'll kill you." His voice is rough with adrenaline and pain, and he sees Aizawa grit his teeth and open his mouth to say something, but the Nomu's fist comes down between them and Aizawa leaps out of the way, his capture weapon dragging Izuku back and out of danger.

Izuku watches the Nomu lunge with its other hand, grabbing Aizawa's elbow, yanking him up, high above its head, and *flinging him* into the ground. Aizawa hits the ground with a sound that makes Izuku choke on his own breath, the concrete cracking on impact. Izuku sputters, trying to pull himself to his feet, as the Nomu stomps a large foot down on Aizawa's back, and Izuku knows from the way Aizawa is bent that his back is broken at the chest. He can't see Aizawa moving, can't see him struggling or breathing or *anything*, and Izuku realizes he's screaming, a high, unsteady sound.

"Him next," Shigaraki says, like he's bored, and the Nomu lurches toward Izuku, stumbling like it's drunk. Izuku makes eye contact with it, sees the way its wide eyes don't react at all to his face, to the way he's crying and screaming.

He doesn't try to dodge the punch it throws at his face, and he's gone the second it hits him.

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Izuku notices the pain before the mist this time, a burning, aching pain in his stomach and head that worsens with his heart beat, pounding through his body. He lands on all fours, the ground here covered in a thin layer of water, the sound of heavy rain and wind filling his ears. Izuku reaches up to cover up his mouth, squeezing his eyes shut as he gags at the pain, the way he feels himself sway. His eyes shoot open and he pulls his hand back just in time as he vomits onto the wet concrete, excelling stomach acid streaked through with something dark red. He coughs, sputtering, and wipes his mouth on the back of his hand.

"Midoriya!" He hears Yaoyorozu's voice, loud and upset. "Are you okay? What's going on?" Izuku glances up to see her and Todoroki standing beside him, alarmed looks on their faces. Izuku shakes his head and stands up, wobbly on his feet.

"I-I get motion sick," he says, and they glance at each other.

"You just threw up blood," Todoroki points out, and Izuku shakes his head again, swallowing down the nausea that starts to rise again.

"I'm fine," he says, voice shaky. "Really." He sees Yaoyorozu open her mouth, like she's going to argue, but the sounds of feet running on top of shallow water interrupts her. Izuku turns to see villains, at least a dozen of them, coming out from between the mock buildings and surrounding them.

"Here they are," one of them saying, smirking. "Let's be nice and share, eh? Let everyone get some fun." He steps forward, cracking his knuckles, and Izuku hears Todoroki sigh beside him.

"I don't have time to deal with this," he says, raising his right hand. Silver-blue ice crackles over the ground, climbing up the villains' feet and freezing them all in place. Izuku blinks as the rain in the area momentarily is turned to hail, falling into the thin layer of water on the ground and splashing slightly. Todoroki doesn't even seem phased as he sighs again, a thin mist coming out with his breath.

"We need to get to the exit and help others evacuate," Todoroki says, and Izuku nods. His head and stomach are still aching, and every part of his body feels hot and sluggish, but he can think clearly now that he's adjusted. *I guess I've found the limits of my quirk*, he thinks. *If I reset to the same place too many times, it seems to make me sick*. He doesn't know for *sure* that that's what's wrong, but nothing else makes sense. He'll have time to analyze himself later.

"Are you sure you're okay, Midoriya?" Yaoyorozu is giving him a look. "You're awfully pale."

Izuku nods. "I'll be fine. Todoroki's right, we need to go help Aizawa-sensei." She pauses, then nods. The three of them start to move forward, running through the water. It's louder than the other zones, here, even louder than the conflagration zone with the crackling and roaring of the flames. Here in the downpour zone, the wind is whipping around the buildings so fast that it howls, and the rain is a constant buzz. Izuku feels every footstep in his bones, his body aching. He has to cover his mouth with a hand to avoid throwing up again, and he can tell from the way Yaoyorozu keeps glancing over at him that she can tell.

They get to the exit of the zone quickly, approaching the large door that marks the end of the dome encircling the area. Izuku wonders, briefly, if it's locked, but Todoroki kicks it open so easily that it must not have been. They run out of the area and onto the concrete, the bright light hitting them unfiltered. It sears Izuku's eyes, and this time he can't help but stop in his tracks, stumbling and leaning over to throw up again. This time, it's mostly just dry heaving, a thin line of sticky blood dripping from his mouth to the ground. He spits, trying to get the metallic taste out of his mouth.

He looks up to see Yaoyorozu and Todoroki looking at him, stopped a few feet past where he'd thrown up. Yaoyorozu is easy to read, alarm and concern on her face, but Todoroki just looks generally dark, his lips a thin line that could be a frown. Izuku wipes his mouth on his hand again, then wipes his hand on the pants of his uniform. He's damp from the rain; they all are, dripping dark spots of water onto the concrete. Izuku takes a shaky breath.

"I'm good now," he says, and he starts running forward again before they can question it. Izuku thinks that this is going to be *really* hard to explain later, if he survives this. He focuses on the slap of his feet against the concrete, cursing the way this zone seems to be the furthest from the central plaza. He hopes they get there in time.

They get there at the moment that Shigaraki and Aizawa are fighting, and Izuku watches Aizawa throw an elbow strike that Shigaraki blocks with his hand. Izuku winces as Aizawa's elbow crackles and breaks, unraveling into tiny pieces. He hears Yaoyorozu's gasp, watches Shigaraki move like he's saying something. *We're almost there*, Izuku thinks.

"Nomu," Shigaraki says. "Kill him." Izuku sees the Nomu stand, lurching to its feet, and he knows what's going to happen before it does, of course he does. But he also knows that if he charges at the Nomu, it won't save Aizawa. Aizawa will try too hard to protect him, even at the expense of his own life. The only thing jumping into the fray would do is get him killed again, and he doesn't know if he'd make it another time. So, instead of putting himself between the Nomu and his teacher, he leaps out, jumping at Shigaraki. He feels his head throb with the motion as he lobs a punch at Shigaraki's head.

The villain sidesteps his punch, hair whipping in the air. His face is twisted in a scowl as he

reaches for Izuku, barely touching all five fingers to Izuku's shoulder. The clothing there flakes and dissolves, but Izuku pulls away before the decay spreads to his skin.

"Hey, Shigaraki," he says, forcing a smirk onto his face even though he feels like throwing up because that was *too close*. "Mad that your final boss isn't here yet?"

Shigaraki's eyes widen the slightest bit, and he makes a whining sound, like an angry child, then steps towards Izuku. Out of his peripheral vision, Izuku watches the Nomu slam Aizawa down, breaking his arm and crushing his face against the concrete. Izuku swallows, knowing it could be worse. It could *always* be worse. Aizawa is still breathing, still moving, his back unbroken. It could be worse. Izuku looks at Shigaraki again, not resisting as Shigaraki grabs at his neck, gripping his throat with all but one finger, his pinky held away from the skin. Izuku can feel his heartbeat in his temple as Shigaraki squeezes for a few seconds, then loosens his grip so it's relaxed, his fingers ghosting over Izuku's skin.

"How'd you know my name?" Shigaraki asks, and Izuku shrugs, exaggerating the gesture. He reaches up, wraps his hand around Shigaraki's wrist. The skin is warm and dry, papery and flaking. He stares into Shigaraki's eyes, red and lined with irritated skin. Izuku tips his head slightly, leaning his neck into Shigaraki's grip.

"Are you going to kill me?" He says, voice low and steady. "It won't matter." He licks his lips, watches Shigaraki blink slowly, like the motion hurts. Izuku can feel adrenaline rushing through his veins, and he hopes Shigaraki can't feel his racing pulse.

"What do you mean, it won't matter?" Shigaraki asks, his lips quirking up in a smirk. "It'll hurt your precious symbol of peace and your teacher, won't it?"

Izuku shrugs, takes a step forward. Shigaraki lets him, his arm bending at the elbow but keeping his loose, four-fingered grasp on Izuku's throat. Izuku squeezes Shigaraki's arm, digs his nails into the skin.

"They won't mind, if it's me," Izuku says simply, casting a quick glance to Aizawa where he lays, collapsed on the ground with his bloodied face turned to look at Izuku. One of his eyes is swollen shut, coated in clotting blood, and the other is its normal black color, his quirk not activated. Izuku knows he'll come back, if he dies, but Aizawa doesn't, and it surprises Izuku to see fear in his eyes.

"Why not?" Shigaraki says, reaching up a hand to touch Izuku's face. He places his thumb and first two fingers on Izuku's cheek, a gentle threat.

"I'm quirkless," Izuku says, smiling and narrowing his eyes, meeting Shigaraki's gaze easily. "The only reason I'm still at this school at all is that I haven't given them a good enough reason to kick me out yet," he says, knowing it's true. He doesn't have to work hard to summon the bitterness in his voice, thinking back to that first day of class where Aizawa expelled him but not Mineta. As much as UA is his dream, it's still the real world. He wouldn't be missed, and if Shigaraki doesn't know that this is a bluff, a ploy to make him think Izuku is sympathetic to his cause, well, that's just fine.

"I *like* this one," Shigaraki says, lips cracking as he grins, showing bone-white teeth that peek out from chapped lips. "You'd die for them, even though they don't like you?" he asks, dropping his hand from Izuku's face.

"I'd die a *hundred* times for them," Izuku replies easily, because it's true. Even if they don't care about him, even if they wouldn't do the same, Izuku will die for them until he finds a way to get to

the end with all of them alive. “I’d do it for strangers, too. That’s why I’m going to be a hero.”

Shigaraki snorts, his face dropping into a sneer. “A hero? Really?” He tightens his grip on Izuku’s neck, and Izuku feels pressure build in his head, sharpening his headache and making the edges of his vision go red and fuzzy. Izuku gasps a wheezing breath, his hand on Shigaraki’s wrist tightening as he starts to struggle, his body thrashing and resisting without him telling it to.

“I’m going to have fun killing you,” Shigaraki growls, and Izuku squeezes his eyes shut, trying to will himself to calm down and trying to get his body to stop jerking against Shigaraki’s grip. If he knocks against Shigaraki’s pinkie, it’s all over.

“Fear not!” A deep, booming voice fills the space, and Shigaraki drops Izuku. “For I am here!” Izuku lands on the ground, coughing. He can hear All Might’s voice, can hear some kind of fight start, but he can’t even lift his head off of the ground where he’s lying. His head pounds with an unnatural intensity, his vision going out with every frantic beat of his heart, and his breath is still choked and wheezing as he struggles to fill his lungs.

He cracks an eye open to see a blur, and he feels himself being lifted off the ground and moved quickly, like that time he’d grabbed onto All Might’s leg. He’s set down on the ground gently, on his side, and then All Might’s gone. Izuku blinks, his vision blurring as he breathes. He sees a familiar face and a head of short brown hair.

“Deku,” Uraraka says, her voice high with worry. “What happened? Are you okay?” Izuku glances past her and sees Tsuyu crouched next to Aizawa, who seems to be conscious, sitting up and clutching the right side of his face while Tsuyu wraps his elbow with fabric.

“G-Get Aizawa-sensei out of here,” he says, gasping. His mouth fills with saliva, but he swallows it down and tries not to throw up. “I’m okay.” He’s panting, he knows, and Uraraka’s brows draw together.

“We’re going to get *both* of you out of here, okay? Just stay awake,” she says, and Izuku wonders, vaguely, why she’s telling *him* to do that. Aizawa’s the one with the head wound, with his right eye swollen and crushed, his skin there red and violet and black. Izuku hopes it doesn’t destroy his eye. What if Eraserhead loses his quirk?

He watches Aizawa lurch to the side, watches Tsuyu catch him as he loses consciousness, alarm on her face, and he reaches out a hand, watching his own fingers shake.

“A-Asui...” he groans, blinking. “I-Is he...?”

Tsuyu glances back at him, her face grim. “He’s alive, ribbit. Just unconscious. And you can call me Tsuyu, Midoriya.”

Izuku hums in agreement, letting his hand fall to the ground. He did it. Aizawa’s alive, and help is on its way. They’re going to make it out. He suddenly hopes, that if whatever’s wrong with his body kills him, he won’t reset. That he’ll stay dead, that the others will get to keep this run. He blinks, his vision refusing to focus.

“Ur...raraka,” he says, and he feels a hand wrap around his. “M gonna... pass out...”

“Try to stay awake,” Uraraka says, but her voice is distant, like he’s underwater. “Deku!” He feels her squeeze his hand, and it refocuses him for just long enough to see the gates of the USJ open, Snipe and Ectoplasm stepping inside the open doors. He sighs in relief and lets his eyes fall shut.

Izuku opens his eyes, blinking against the bright light that fills them. He feels a pounding in his head, like he's been hit with a sledgehammer, and as he glances around the room, seeing an IV drip and a heart monitor machine beside him, he registers the way his chest and stomach ache, the way he's shaking the tiniest bit even under the pale blue hospital blanket draped over him.

"Izuku!" His mom's voice is a quiet, desperate whisper, and he blinks, shifting his head to see her standing at his bedside. Uraraka and Iida are standing next to her, and Izuku slowly recognizes the buzz of voices and movement around him.

"Where...?" he tries to ask, his mouth dry and sticky.

"We're in the emergency department," Iida says, his hands gripped tightly on the railing of Izuku's bed. Izuku sees his mom's hand over his own, Uraraka's gripping the railing next to Iida's. He blinks.

"Is anyone else hurt?" He asks, looking into their eyes and watching Uraraka shake her head, tearing welling up in her eyes.

"Only you, Aizawa-sensei, and Thirteen were seriously hurt," Iida replies for her, glances over at her. "Aizawa-sensei is in surgery, but they think he'll make a full recovery. Thirteen is..." he swallows visibly, his throat bobbing. "They're optimistic she'll survive, but they don't know for sure."

Izuku nods, the motion hurting his head. He looks at his mom, the way her eyes are wide and there are damp tear tracks going down her cheeks, her nose rubbed raw like she's been crying for hours.

"Sorry, mom," he says, squeezing her hand where it's holding his. "I'm okay, now."

She nods, a sob shaking her shoulders. "W-When they said you were injured, that they didn't know why, I-I just--"

"I'm okay," he smiles at her. "I'm sorry I scared you." She just nods, wiping at her tears with her free hand, and Izuku feels a burst of guilt in his chest for doing this to her.

"What happened, Midoriya?" Uraraka asks, her voice wet. "T-They said your only clear injury was from, um, strangulation, but that it looked like you'd been hit by a quirk of some kind." She bites her lip, her eyes wet.

"I don't know," Izuku replies, reaching up with his free hand to feel at his neck. "How long have I been out?"

"About four hours," Iida says. "They treated your neck injuries already, but you have a nasty bruise."

Izuku nods, putting his hand back down by his side. "Everyone's okay? For real? We made it out?" He watches their faces, thinks about how many ways he saw others nearly die and how he saw Aizawa, broken and bloody.

Uraraka nods, a small smile on her lips. "For real," she whispers. "We made it."

cw: vomit, hospitals, temporary major character death, strangulation

i hope you enjoyed!!!! thank you all for all of the support; comments feed my intense need for positive attention. for everybody who guessed that izuku's quirk had some kind of limit, you were right!! i'll explore it more further on, but :3

recovery

Chapter Summary

last time: izuku survived the usj by being a badass and arguing with shiggy

Chapter Notes

help how did this get so long

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Izuku sits in his bed, playing a game on his phone. They'd moved him into a private room on his second day here, deciding to keep him for further observation, even though he'd insisted he was okay to recover at home. There'd been words tossed around like *inflammation* and *intracranial pressure* and *aplastic anemia*. They'd given him two bags of blood, which had scared his mom so much she'd fallen asleep on him, crying.

He'd been questioned extensively, too, both about the quirk that was making him sick and what happened at the USJ. He'd told them, of course, that he doesn't know who got him, how the quirk was transferred to him. The police were anxious, and the medical staff were curious, explaining to him that the quirk that had affected him was damaging only his fast-replicating cells, like chemotherapy or radiation. Being able to inflict that on someone else would be devastating, they said. He was lucky it was fading as he healed, that his bone marrow and his stomach lining were repairing themselves and the pressure in his brain (they still weren't sure why that happened--nerves aren't fast replicating--but there were theories full of medical terms he didn't understand) went down fast enough that they didn't need to do surgery.

Izuku doesn't think it's luck, but he does think that he'll need to be more careful with his quirk. Killing himself once or twice is fine, but if he's in a dangerous situation, he needs to die as little as possible. What if he'd died another time, and his body hadn't survived it? Would he still reset? Or would he stay down after his quirk killed him? He doesn't want to find out.

The sound of someone clearing their throat startles Izuku, and he looks up, blinking. Aizawa is standing in the doorway to his room, wearing a grey t-shirt and black sweatpants. His right eye is covered in white gauze, yellowing bruise peeking out from underneath, and his left arm is in a sling, but he's not hooked up to anything and he's not wearing a hospital bracelet. *He's been discharged*, Izuku notes, a soft bloom of relief in his chest.

"Midoriya," Aizawa says, looking around. "Is your mom here?"

Izuku shakes his head. "I made her go home to rest," he answers, locking his phone and setting it on the table beside his bed. Aizawa nods, stepping into the room and sitting in the chair already pulled up beside the bed. His hair's tied back, something Izuku hasn't seen before, and it makes him look younger for some reason.

"We need to talk," Aizawa says, leaning forward and resting his uninjured arm on his knee. "I'm

assuming you already know why.” Izuku does. He’s been dreading it, hoping it wouldn’t happen.

Izuku swallows. “Y-You’re going to expel me,” he says, and Aizawa’s eyes widen for a second before he sighs, reaching up to massage his temple.

“No, I’m not going to expel you,” he says, voice low and rough. “I was going to ask you about what you said to Shigaraki.”

Izuku blinks. “Oh,” he whispers, taking in Aizawa’s face. He looks tired, sure, but there’s something bitter and concerned in his features. His stubble is longer than normal, and Izuku bets he can’t shave with the bandages on his face.

“Yeah,” Aizawa says. “I *was* going to ask if you meant what you said, but if you thought I was going to expel you, I have a feeling the answer is yes.” He meets Izuku’s gaze with his one available eye.

“I, um.” Izuku fidgets with his hands, looking away from Aizawa. “I-It’s okay,” he says. “W-We don’t have to talk about it.” He desperately, desperately hopes Aizawa will drop it, because even though he knows Aizawa doesn’t like him, thinks he’s unfit for UA, thinks he’s useless and quirkless, he doesn’t want to *hear it*.

“I think we do, actually,” Aizawa says. “You think that UA--that me and All Might--want you gone because you’re quirkless. That we’d be fine if you died.”

Izuku shrugs, picks at a loose thread from the blanket. He hears Aizawa sigh, long and deep, but he doesn’t look up, instead choosing to stare at his hands.

“I would *not* be okay with you dying,” Aizawa says, and it startles Izuku into looking up at him, to seeing his face, serious and unyielding. “And I don’t want you out of my class for any reason, especially not your quirkless status.”

“R-Really?” Izuku asks, because it’s all he can ask. He waits to see amusement or cruelty on Aizawa’s face but it isn’t there. He stares back at Izuku, nods.

“I don’t want *any* of my students to die. You’re my responsibility, and I take that very seriously. I was willing to die to save you and your classmates at the USJ,” he says, and Izuku has to shut his eyes when he says that because he *knows*, he watched Aizawa’s face get slammed into the ground hard enough to crack his skull, watched Aizawa’s back get snapped in two by the Nomu. Izuku takes a deep, shuddering breath and opens his eyes again. Aizawa looks back at him, solemn.

“I don’t know what I did to give you the impression that I’m biased against the quirkless,” Aizawa says, keeping eye contact as he does, “but I have no bias against you or any other quirkless person. I owe you an apology for the fact that I’ve led you to believe that wasn’t the case.”

“The f-first day,” Izuku says, biting his lip. “The quirk assessment test.”

Aizawa tilts his head slightly, his brow furrowing. “What?”

“That’s why,” Izuku says, shrugging. “It was an obvious ploy to get rid of me, and you’d assumed I would get last place. But you didn’t expel Mineta, since he’s got a quirk, so it was just to get at me.” He looks at Aizawa’s bandaged eye, not his open one. The gauze is clean, fresh. He wonders if it was changed this morning.

“I wouldn’t have expelled you, either, if you’d gotten last, Midoriya,” Aizawa says, and Izuku clenches his fists around handfuls of the blanket.

“You’re *lying*,” he hisses, looking down and away from his teacher. “You would have. If I hadn’t asked Uraraka for help and I’d just tried my best instead, you would have expelled me.” There’s a pause, a moment where Izuku wonders if this is it. If Aizawa will admit it and expel Izuku and it’ll all be over. Izuku briefly considers killing himself, just for the relief it gives, but pushes the thought away. He needs to be healed, first. Once his body recovers, once he’s back to normal, he knows he can die one or two times and be okay.

“You’re right,” Aizawa says. “But I wouldn’t if you’d asked her for help like you did and gotten last anyway.” Izuku looks up at him, sees the thoughtful look on his face and frowns.

“What do you mean?” Izuku asks, his tone almost demanding.

“Every year, I expel students who I judge to have a mindset that is dangerous to themselves or others, should they be placed in the field,” Aizawa says. “Last year, I expelled the whole class. I re-enrolled them a week later, when it had sunk in that being reckless or not taking heroics seriously had consequences.”

“What?” Izuku whispers, blinking. He’d killed himself for nothing? Aizawa was just teaching him a *lesson*?

“If you’d tried your best on every exercise but not thought outside the box like you did, I probably would have expelled you for a few days, then re-enrolled you and told you that since you’re working at a disadvantage, you can’t always just try your best and expect to win. You need to be better and smarter than your peers if you want to survive.” Aizawa’s lips quirk up into a small smile. “You don’t seem to have a problem with that, though. If anything, I’d say you think outside of the box by default.”

“How could you not consider what that would *do* to me?” Izuku says before he can think better of it, and Aizawa blinks in surprise, reeling back slightly at the venom in his tone. “I’m *quirkless*. All Might, my *idol*, told me I should give up on being a hero. My *mom* didn’t believe I could be a hero. I got into UA,” he’s practically snarling at this point, but he can’t help himself. “And I got in by fighting tooth and nail through *everyone* and *everything* working against me. And you-- you would have expelled me to teach me a lesson? You would have let me think for *days* that my dream had finally been crushed once and for all, that there was no chance of me being a hero, because it’d make me *think outside the box*?” Izuku clenches his fists, feels the blood drain out of them. He swallows, jaw clenching, before he says, “How could you *do* that to someone?”

Aizawa’s eyes are wide, and Izuku feels a rush of fear and guilt hit him because he’d just yelled at a *teacher* and a *pro hero*, not to mention the person who quite possibly holds the most power over his life and future right now. The person who’d been willing to die for him, willing to have his face smashed into a bloody mess. Izuku swallows, blinking against the rising anxiety.

“You’re right,” Aizawa says, startling Izuku. “And I’m sorry. It was wrong of me, and I made you think that you couldn’t trust me, that I considered you unimportant or unworthy because of your quirk.” He meets Izuku’s gaze, deadly serious. “It was wrong of me, and I apologize.”

Izuku opens his mouth to reply, but instead, a sob rises in his throat, and he realizes in horror that he’s *crying*, tears suddenly building up in his eyes, hot and wet. He takes a shuddery breath and brings his hands to his face, covering his eyes like that’ll hide them from Aizawa.

He hears a soft sigh, then feels the weight of a hand on his back, warm and heavy. Aizawa rubs slow, gentle circles into his back as he cries.

--

Izuku swallows nervously as he approaches the gate on his first day back to school after USJ. He'd ended up spending a week, total, in the hospital, until the doctors were sure that the aftereffects of his quirk were gone and not coming back. They said it'd been remarkable, really, how well he'd recovered. He's been at home on rest orders for three days after that, but he was finally cleared to go back to class. He knows that he's only actually missed those last three days of class--Kacchan had brought notes over, giving them to Izuku's mom and telling her they'd been given a week off to recuperate--but he still feels strange, like he doesn't belong here.

"Deku!" At Uraraka's voice, Izuku blinks and turns, seeing her running up behind him, a wide smile on her face.

"Oh my gosh, I'm so glad you're back!" She says, pulling him into a tight hug. "Everyone has been so worried about you! Bakugou said you were recovering at home, but nobody knew when we'd see you again, and oh I *missed* you!" She squeezes him, lifting him up off the ground a few inches.

"Uraraka, I-I'm okay!" Izuku says, his face heating up even as she sets him down. "How's Aizawa-sensei's eye?"

"It's okay!" She says, smiling and walking into the campus, Izuku walking with her. "He's got a super cool scar now, but he says he can see and use his quirk just fine!"

"Thank goodness," Izuku says, and they walk through the campus together, Uraraka asking him questions about his recovery, about what had happened. Izuku answers them all patiently, his face warm as Uraraka gushes over him, worrying about his symptoms and the strange mystery quirk that had taken him down. They're in the hallway that houses the classroom before he knows it, and Izuku finds himself hesitating at the end of the hall.

"What's wrong?" Uraraka asks, a few steps ahead of him, her head turned over her shoulder.

"I-I'm just a little nervous," Izuku says, worrying at his bottom lip with his teeth. "I'm worried that, um, that it'll be weird."

"Don't be!" Uraraka says, smiling. "Everyone's missed you." She starts for the classroom again, and Izuku reluctantly follows, dragging his feet a little, his shoes squeaking on the tile. The large door that marks the entrance to their classroom is open already, but it's not a surprise. They're not early enough to be the first ones in the classroom, and Izuku can already hear the sounds of chatter drifting down the hallway.

He steps into the doorway just behind Uraraka, some part of him hoping that he'll be hidden behind her, but he can hear the way the sounds of conversation stop when he walks into the room. He looks up from the floor, swallowing around the lump rising in his throat, and he sees Tsuyu, Iida, Todoroki, Yaoyorozu, Kacchan, Kaminari, and Kirishima already in the classroom, all staring at him and Uraraka. Well, Kacchan isn't staring at them; he's looking at his phone, but Izuku can see that he's just staring at the lock screen.

"Midoriya," Tsuyu says, a smile splitting her face. "Welcome back, ribbit." Izuku blinks, relief washing over him, and the room suddenly erupts in sound, everyone trying to talk at once.

"Are you okay?" Yaoyorozu asks at the same time Kirishima says, "Dude, I heard what you did with the Shigaraki guy, that was super manly. I would have peed my pants!" Iida, just a heartbeat behind, says, "I'm glad to see you back, Midoriya." Izuku can see Kaminari saying something to Kacchan, too, but he can't make out what he says, and Kacchan seems to be ignoring him. Izuku just blinking, opening his mouth to respond but unsure of who to reply to.

“Give him some fucking space,” Kacchan snarls from his seat, still not looking up from his phone. “Nobody can understand what you assholes are saying if you all talk at the same damn time.” Everyone’s gaze switches to Kacchan, and Izuku sighs a quiet breath of relief, silently thanking Kacchan.

“Um,” Yaoyorozu says, looking back to him. “Are you doing okay?” She seems hesitant. “We heard that you’d been attacked with an illness-inducing quirk.”

Izuku nods as Uraraka grabs his hand and tugs him into the classroom. “Y-Yeah! I’m okay now, i-it was just temporary.” He glances over at Todoroki, who’s watching him with a blank face, eyes ever-so-slightly narrowed. Izuku swallows, not knowing what *that* means.

They take turns asking him questions, telling him how *cool* it’d been that he’d stood up to the villain, that he’d bought time for everyone while the heroes were on their way. As more of his classmates filter into the classroom, they join in, and it dissolves into talking about the incident, about who’d been sent where and what they’d had to face. Izuku lets himself fade into the background, comfortable to listen to his classmates, soaking in the fact that they’re all here, alive and safe. It makes it all worth it, and he finds himself really smiling--smiling for real, *meaning* it--for the first time in a long while.

--

“Midoriya,” Aizawa’s voice interrupts him on his way out of homeroom one day later that week, and Izuku freezes, turning back to look at him. He hates the way his stomach churns with anxiety. Some sick part of him is wondering if Aizawa has changed his mind--if he’s going to get rid of him, because he’s quirkless and useless--but Izuku pushes the thought away.

“Y-Yes sir?” Izuku asks, hesitating in the doorway, shifting from foot to foot.

“I want to talk to you about something,” Aizawa says, his face not betraying any signs of anger or animosity, thankfully. “I’ll write you a pass for English, so don’t worry about being late.”

Izuku swallows, steps back into the classroom because that means he’s not going to get away with making an excuse about having to get to class and walking away before Aizawa can stop him. He’s going to have to stay for this, whatever it is.

“You’re not in trouble,” Aizawa says, sighing at whatever he sees on Izuku’s face. “I think it’s about time we got you a weapon.”

Izuku blinks, looking up at him in surprise. “A-A weapon?” He watches Aizawa nod.

“You’re quirkless,” Aizawa says, stepping out from behind his desk. “Which puts you at an inherent disadvantage against any villains with quirks that can be used in combat. For people like you and me, having a weapon is an essential part of being prepared.”

“L-Like you?” Izuku asks before he can stop himself.

Aizawa leans against the front of his desk, putting his hands in his pockets. “Against people with heteromorphic quirks, I’m essentially quirkless,” he says. “That’s part of why I use my capture weapon.” He gestures to the scarf, and Izuku nods, because he’d *known* that, even if it hadn’t been worded that way in his head. He hadn’t thought about it like that, that Aizawa was like him. *More like him than he realizes*, Izuku thinks, *since we both have quirks that aren’t always useful*.

“S-So, um, you want me to learn to use a w-weapon?” Izuku asks, tilting his head slightly, bringing his hand up to hold the strap of his backpack where it’s tossed over his shoulder.

Aizawa nods. "Not on your own. I would like to start having supplemental training sessions with you, if you're amenable to the idea. We would meet after the end of classes, three times a week."

Izuku finds himself nodding quickly, before Aizawa's even finished speaking. "Y-Yes!" he says, unable to help the grin that splits his face. "I-I want to!" For all of the distrust he has of Aizawa, of teachers in general, Aizawa is still *Eraserhead*, a pro hero and an amazing underground fighter, someone who Izuku's looked up to for a long time, especially as Ace. He can't believe that *this* is what Aizawa wanted to talk to him about, of all things.

"Good," Aizawa says, the edges of his lips quirking up slightly. "I'll see you after school, then. Meet me outside of gym gamma."

Izuku nods. "Y-Yes sir!" he chirps.

--

He tugs on his goggles, feeling an odd sense of relief at being back in his vigilante outfit. He hadn't been out on the streets since starting at UA, and he'd *finally* convinced his mom that he would be okay to go out as Ace. He'd had to practically beg her, promising to be careful and not to do anything too risky. Technically, he's not lying to her; nothing is really risky for him if he only dies once or twice, right?

He steps out of their front door, careful to make sure nobody is out on the streets to see him leaving his house, and he starts off towards his usual patrol route, the part of the city that feels like home, with the tall buildings and narrow alleyways, the bright lights and loud, pounding music. He runs faster than is really necessary, because he *misses* it. As much as UA is amazing, as much as it's his dream, there's something about being out on the streets at night that just feels right. Maybe it's the anonymity. Izuku's never liked being the center of attention, not since he was a little kid.

It's a cool, clear night, and the air is drier than he's used to. It hasn't rained in a while, longer than usual, so the pavement is bone dry and a soft, cool grey as he moves through the city, weaving between buildings. It's a full moon, too, and it makes it brighter than usual, like there's one too many street lamps on or like he'd gone out early. Even after more than a week away, the sounds of the city still make sense to him, reading like an open book. He can hear the party a few buildings over, the throb and pulse of the music, and he can hear the people talking on their balcony above him, cigarette smoke floating gently above them.

It occurs to him, looking up at the buildings that stretch several stories up, that as much time as he's spent falling from buildings, he doesn't really know how to do much other than, well, fall. He's watched a few videos on climbing and parkour, but he'd never really tried it, never really tried to move around on the top of the city instead of crawling along the bottom. *It's not like it'd be an issue if I messed up and fell*, he thinks.

With that thought, he walks over to the next alleyway, one that doesn't have anybody on balconies above. The lights in the windows are off, too, and Izuku thinks it's some kind of ragged office building, something that looks like it's seen better days for sure.

He tenses his legs, then jumps, wrapping his hands around the base of the fire escape, the cold, rusty metal digging into his skin. It's painful, but not as painful as the other stuff he's survived, and he doesn't even react to the pain as he pulls himself up with his arms, hooking one leg around a piece of metal that supports the fire escape, a diagonal bar that anchors it to the building. It's harder than he expected, lifting his body up like this, but it only takes him a couple of moments before he's heaved himself over the railing and onto the first floor fire escape.

He takes the stairs up to the top level, not because he doesn't think he'd have been able to climb up without them, but because there's something else he wants to try, something he's wanted to do since he was a little kid watching hero tapes in his bedroom. This fire escape reaches pretty high, and the roof of this building is flat, so Izuku can easily stand on the railing where it connects to the building and haul himself onto the roof, even if wriggling against the concrete hurts his hips and stomach where the corner of the roof digs into him.

He pulls himself to his feet, wiping off the thin layer of pale dust on the front of his hoodie. It's getting warmer out; soon, he'll have to switch to just wearing the long sleeved shirt he has on underneath. His mom had said she was working on one that had an English "A" on the back in red, and Izuku has to admit, he's kind of excited. It'll be nice to have something like that for this part of him.

The city is pretty from this high up, especially at night. He can see the yellow-gold of lit windows, the bright colors of neon signs outside of businesses and in the windows of shops. He can even see that parking lot, where he'd chased the portal guy and held him off until Eraserhead got there. It's comforting, to be able to see everything like this. Izuku thinks he's a little too fond of roofs in general, but who can blame him?

He walks around the edge of the roof, carefully trying to judge the distance between it and the other buildings. North and south are a no go--there are streets, not other buildings--but the building to the east should work. The alleyway there is narrow, and the building next to the one he's on top of is about four feet shorter than this one. It should make it easier.

Izuku steps back, gives himself as much space as he can, then runs at the edge of the roof. He might have been scared if not for how many times he's jumped from roofs already, so it's eбай for him to run right at the ledge and leap just before he would step onto empty air, sailing across the gap and landing on the next building over with a thump. The impact is stronger than he'd expected, and he crashes down, his knees and hands smacking into the concrete first, then his face as he's not able to hold himself up. His momentum smashes him into the roof painfully, but as he sits up, reaching up to touch his bruised cheek with a scraped palm, he grins. He'd jumped from roof to roof, like vigilantes and underground heroes on TV do, like he'd always wondered about.

He sits up, pulling his legs out from under them and stretching them out. His jeans are studded with little pebbles on his knees, and he brushes them off, wincing at the sting in his knees. He'll need to learn how to land, if he plans on making a habit of this.

--

After classes one afternoon, Izuku is walking home, enjoying the late spring warmth on his skin, when he hears footsteps behind him. He turns and sees Kacchan, backpack slung over his shoulder, walking quickly. Kacchan quickly catches up with him, a frown on his face. Izuku isn't sure if he should be nervous or not; in the past, if Kacchan came to him after school, it meant Izuku was about to get blown up, but Kacchan also hasn't done anything like that in a while.

"So," Kacchan says, "what kind is it?"

"Huh?" Izuku blinks at him, and Kacchan's frown deepens to a scowl.

"Your quirk, dumbass. Is it latent, or does it have a specific activation requirement?" Kacchan kicks at the ground in front of them, sending a little pebble skittering over the ground. Izuku watches it.

"H-How do you know--"

“I read up on it, what the fuck do you think?” Kacchan huffs a heavy breath of air. “So which one is it?”

Izuku folds his arms over his chest. He knows Kacchan catches the motion. “I-It’s, um. It’s got a specific activation requirement.” He stares at the ground, pretends he can’t see Kacchan’s red eyes and blonde hair in his peripheral vision.

“What is it?” Kacchan asks, and Izuku looks up at him despite himself.

“I- Um. I-It’s n-not really a b-big deal. Um. I-I don’t want--” Izuku is cut off by Kacchan shoving him with an elbow and growling out,

“God, Deku, I’m not going to fucking beat you up. You don’t have to tell me if you don’t want to.” Kacchan isn’t looking at Izuku’s eyes, his gaze instead on Izuku’s chest, where they both know there’s a burn scar the size and shape of 11 year old Kacchan’s palm.

“I-I know,” Izuku says, because it’s instinct.

“Do you?” Kacchan says, almost a mumble. “I’m done beating you up. It was shitty of me,” he growls, and Izuku blinks.

“Um,” he says, and Kacchan bites his lip. “I-It was. Shitty?” Izuku can’t really get the words out, can’t really formulate a coherent sentence, but thankfully Kacchan has known him long enough to know what he’s asking.

“Yeah, it was really fucking shitty of me.” Kacchan shrugs, and he folds his arms over his chest, a mirror of Izuku. “Don’t fucking tell anyone I said this, okay? But I’m-- I’m sorry.” Kacchan kicks at the ground again, even though there aren’t any rocks to send flying. Izuku stops walking, suddenly, staring open mouthed at him. Kacchan stops, too, turns back and arches a brow at Izuku.

“Trying to catch flies?” Kacchan says, and Izuku is sure he can hear a laugh in his voice.

“T-Thank you,” Izuku says, because he thinks it’s what he’s supposed to say and also because he means it. Because hearing Kacchan say sorry is something he’s wished for for *years* .

Kacchan scowls. “Don’t thank me, dumbass. What the hell?”

Izuku rolls his eyes and starts walking again, smiling when Kacchan joins him. “I found out about it, um. On that day with the slime villain?”

“Yeah?” Kacchan says, eyeing him. “What about it?”

“It, um. It attacked me first,” Izuku says, voice small and low. “My quirk, it, um, it activated because of that. S-So that’s how I knew to go for the eyes.” It’s his turn to kick at the ground, to brush up dust and send a small rock flying.

“Hm,” Kacchan grunts, and Izuku looks up at him. There’s a dark sort of undertone to his eyes. “You’re not going to tell me what the fuck your quirk is, are you,” he says, and it’s not actually a question.

“I-I...” Izuku swallows. “Not yet.”

Kacchan shrugs. “Okay,” he says, and shoves his hands into his pockets.

They walk the rest of the way home together in silence, but it isn’t an uncomfortable one.

Being back on the streets gives Izuku something he hadn't realized he was missing. Surviving USJ, making it through alive and with his teacher intact, had been difficult and it had been terrifying. Saving people on the streets, giving them their stolen purses back and breaking up fights, punching too-pushy men and threatening violent drunks--well, it isn't glorious and desperate like USJ was, but Izuku loves it all the same. There's something different about throwing himself into these life-or-death situations that makes it better than if he'd been forced into it, if he had no choice but to fight.

He doesn't give up on the people of the streets, not once he notices what's happening. If he's too late to break up a fight and someone gets killed, he'll jump from a roof or a fire escape and get there faster next time. If he messes up, if he makes things worse, he can press the reset button and get another try. It's simple, and it doesn't bother him. He doesn't feel sick, doesn't feel a headache or that burning stomach ache, but then again, he only ever dies once or twice like this. He almost misses dying, on the nights that nothing happens, when the streets are quiet and calm and he goes back home without so much as a bruise.

It's nice, knowing what will happen before it does, knowing what to say and how people will respond, how they'll react. It makes him feel *powerful* in a way that he's never really felt before, so maybe that's why he spends a lot of his time thinking about Ace's quirk. The fake one, not the one that he has, the one that brings him back to life over and over again. He fills a page in a notebook about it, about his ruse, and he hides it with his costume, doesn't dare bring it to school.

The media seems to know very little about him, really. He doesn't make headlines, not lately, but he's occasionally in reports about villain sightings or hero activity. There's a couple of news websites that talk exclusively about vigilantes, and he's on one of them a *lot*, so much that he wonders if the reporter is a fan of his. They all describe his quirk as foresight, but they seem to disagree on how it works. Nobody's ever seen any outward sign of him using it, after all.

Izuku thinks it's kind of funny. He bases his fictional quirk around his vigilante name, and he knows people will assume it was the other way around. He describes the quirk as activating only in dangerous situations, ones where he could die. He says it gives Ace a hand of cards, in essence, a number of ways things could go poorly. A number of undesirable futures. He thinks it's pretty close to the truth, if he leaves out the fact that these futures actually *do* happen. His actual quirk could probably be explained as a foresight quirk, actually, if he twists the words right. He *experiences* awful futures, learns about the twists and turns that lead to dead ends. If he leaves out the fact that he kills himself, it's pretty believable.

He's taken to hanging out on rooftops, lately. They're quiet, familiar, and safe; if something goes wrong, he automatically has an out, a way to reset things. Nobody really seems to spend much time on roofs, anyway, and the more Izuku practices climbing and jumping and landing without hurting himself, the more rooftops he can get onto. It's almost become a game for him, trying to get on top of buildings that are locked or that don't have roof access from the inside or from a fire escape.

He's on top of a building now, one that he'd had to pick a lock to get inside in the first place. There wasn't a door to the roof, so he'd wiggled out of the top floor window and climbed up onto it, and now he's just resting, sitting with his back to what he's pretty sure is some kind of air conditioning unit. A lot of the roofs have them, and they're metal and industrial, so they must perform some kind of function. Izuku can read up on it later, if he wants. He doesn't bring his phone when he's out as Ace.

The air is cool, tonight, and it's quiet except for the usual buzz of the city below him. The building

underneath is almost too silent, and he can hear the light breeze that brushes over the top of the roof, a soft whisper in his ears. The sky is dark and glittering, lit from beneath by light pollution but not so much that he can't see stars peeking out from between the clouds. It'll probably rain in a day or two.

"It's pretty, right?" Izuku blinks, startled at the sound of a female voice. He glances over to see a woman, only a few years older than him, standing on the rooftop. Her hair is long and dark, in a braid that reaches past her hips and sways in the wind. She's wearing a sleeveless top and a pair of dark green utility pants, with a belt holding a first aid kit and a pair of brass knuckles, shining a dark gold in the dim light. Her eyes are on him, big and brown and amused. He starts to stand up, gets ready to make his getaway, but she raises a hand and laughs.

"Relax, kid, I'm not here to crash your party." She plops down, dropping to sit cross legged on the roof. She's about ten feet away from him, seemingly calm. "You're Ace, right? I've seen you on the news and stuff."

Izuku cautiously leans back against the metal, trying to make himself look calm as well. "That's right. Who are you?" He figures if this goes bad, this is a fourteen-story building. He can just jump.

"Oh, I'm a new hero. I'm actually still workshopping the name though, embarrassing, right?" She says, tipping her head back and chuckling. "Ms. Joke says it's too edgy, which I feel like is kind of the point?"

"Ms. Joke?" Izuku asks, and the name is familiar but he can't remember where he'd heard it before. He knows she's a pro hero, but he can't remember the details.

"Yeah, she taught me at Shiketsu," the girl answers, and it clicks for Izuku. "For now, I'm going by Avenging Angel. Like I said, it might change, though." She smiles at him. "It's not nearly as nice and concise as your name."

Izuku shrugs, feeling his face heat up the tiniest bit. "Yours is fine, too," he says. "If you're a pro hero, shouldn't you be arresting me?"

She shrugs. "Nah. I'm trying to be underground, so I'm supposed to have a working relationship with the vigilantes anyway. That's what my boss told me, but I'm pretty sure he didn't mean for me to go and find one on my third night on patrol."

Izuku blinks. "It's only your third night?" He's suddenly struck with an image of his future, as a pro hero who's been secretly patrolling underground for years. He can't imagine starting from the beginning as a pro.

"I mean, I did work-studies and stuff," she says, picking at something on the concrete in front of her legs. "But it's my third day out on the street as a legit sidekick! They've had me doing paperwork and stuff for weeks, yuck. Apparently it's how they haze new hires," She laughs, flicking her long braid over one shoulder so it falls into her lap.

Izuku doesn't know what to say, so he just looks away from her, over to the skyline. This building is tall, but it isn't the tallest, and he can see a number of buildings, both shorter and taller than this one. It makes the city look almost like the ocean, with rippling waves and an uneven surface. He exhales, slowly and calmly.

"It is pretty," he says, thinking back to her earlier comment. "I like it up here."

“Mmhm!” She hums. “Do you come out here often?”

“Not to this particular building,” he replies, glancing over at her. “Trying to get information about my patrol route?” He sees the way she stiffens, eyes going a little bit wide.

“N-No!” She replies, and he feels a little bit of pride at having read her. He’s getting good at that. “Jeez, you really can see the future, huh?”

He shrugs. “I didn’t use my quirk just then, if that’s what you’re asking.” He sighs, standing up. “I’ve got to go,” he says, walking toward the side of the building that he’d left a window open on.

“I’ll see you around,” she replies, and Izuku wonders if it’s a threat or if he’s just becoming a little paranoid.

--

Training with Aizawa is *brutal*. Izuku isn’t sure what he expected, exactly, but it wasn’t this. Aizawa is standing in front of him, in a fighting stance that mirrors Izuku’s own, but Izuku is *dripping* sweat and Aizawa barely seems phased. Izuku’s wearing his sports uniform, and Aizawa is in a t-shirt and shorts, and for some reason that’d made Izuku think they’d be doing something easy. Not *this*.

Izuku ducks forward, throwing an elbow at Aizawa, and Aizawa easily steps out of the way of it, using the momentum of his dodge to throw a neat punch and hits right where Izuku’s guard is open, in the center of the chest. It’s a controlled hit, like all of the ones Aizawa had hit him with, and it just barely stings, but Izuku huffs, frustrated. He hasn’t been able to land a hit on his teacher since they started.

“Where did you learn to fight?” Aizawa asks, casual. He doesn’t seem to be judging Izuku, necessarily, but the bored look on his face makes Izuku feel like he is.

“Um, I-I watched videos on YouTube,” Izuku answers, wincing a little when Aizawa nods, unsurprised.

“I thought it was something like that. You’ve got good coordination and form, but you leave yourself open and you have a habit of leaning too far forward,” Aizawa says, lifting his arms. “You should keep your elbows more tucked in, like this. And when you throw an elbow like that, you need to turn your hip with it, like,” he throws an elbow strike into the air, a quick, neat movement, “that. It’ll give it more power and you won’t be as open to counterstrikes.”

Izuku nods and tries to copy Aizawa’s stance, pulling his elbows in a little bit more. He glances up at his teacher, who gives him a small nod. He throws another elbow strike, this time trying to rotate his hip like Aizawa did. It *feels* better than last time, and when Aizawa throws a kick at his midsection, Izuku is ready to block with his other arm.

“Better,” Aizawa says, dropping out of his fighting stance and walking to the corner of the gym, where a black leather punching bag hangs down from a silver chain on the ceiling. “I want you to do twenty of those on this. I’ll hold it steady for you.” He gets behind the bag, bracing against it, and Izuku blinks walking over there. He stops in front of the bag, looking it over, then throws an elbow at it.

“Like this?” He asks, and Aizawa shakes his head.

“Get closer. You’re too far back; you’re leaning again.” Aizawa readjusts his grip.

Izuku throws another one, this one smacking into the bag with a satisfying noise. He straightens up, getting back into his fighting stance.

“Breathe out when you hit,” Aizawa says. “And pull back faster; in a real fight you don’t want to linger with your elbow sticking out.”

Izuku nods, takes a deep breath, and tries again.

--

Izuku sits on the roof, swinging his hands where they dangle over the edge. It’s hot out today, and the sun falls unfiltered onto him up here, making him sweat. It’s kind of unpleasant, to be honest, especially with his UA uniform being long sleeved, but he just needed to get away from everyone for a little bit.

It’s not that they were mean to him. Izuku’s used to that, and he’s used to the comments and the shoving that comes with it. But UA is... different. It’s not like middle school, and he doesn’t know how to *deal* with it. When he gets to class in the morning, people say hello to him and they’re not joking. In the breaks between classes, people *talk* to him, not condescending and not rude. They ask him if they can look at his notes, and when he shows them, they don’t make fun of him or call him creepy or a freak. After school, someone *always* walks with him to the train station, and Kacchan usually walks from the train to their homes, just a block apart from each other. Even if they don’t always talk, they walk together.

It’s nice, and Izuku likes it, but the thing is it’s a *lot*. For the past ten or so years, Izuku has been more or less alone. He’s walked home alone, sat alone at lunch, played alone at recess. His only interaction with people his age for most of his life has been getting bullied. He remembers getting shoved into bathroom stalls so that kids could dump his backpack in the toilet, remembers walking home alone after with his stuff in a black plastic trash bag the school nurse had given to him. His mom had asked him about it, and he’s said he dropped it in a puddle by accident. He knows she didn’t believe him.

So when people crowd around him, his first instinct is to feel afraid. He thinks it’s unfair to his friends, really, but he can’t help it. He thinks Uraraka and Iida have picked up on it, for sure, and he hasn’t missed the way that Kacchan has started yelling at people if Izuku gets too nervous. He thinks that Todoroki and Tsuyu have noticed as well, because they pull him away for one on one conversations if the class is getting rowdy. Well, Tsuyu pulls him away to talk. Todoroki always uses the group project they’d been assigned to do together as an excuse, even though they both know it’s already good enough for a perfect score. Midnight doesn’t grade that harshly, anyway, and both Izuku and Todoroki seem to be perfectionists.

Izuku wonders about Todoroki, sometimes. He’s quiet, and he’s decidedly *not* like Izuku, but he sometimes acts similarly, sometimes flinches if people move too quickly or too close to his face. Izuku sees him avoid conversation, avoid talking to people, but he also sees the way he hovers around the edges of the group, never *leaving*, just distant. It reminds Izuku of the way he feels when he’s crowded, like his body thinks to expect pain even when logically, reasonably, he knows it’s not coming. Some part of him is hardwired to expect it, to expect unkind words and harsh fists.

So, he’s taken to coming up to the roof, on days that it’s too much for him. It’s easy to get up here, considering that there’s actually a door to access the roof and picking the lock doesn’t seem to set off any alarms. He supposes nobody that’s on the campus in the first place would be an issue. They’ve even managed to step *up* security after the USJ incident. Some of his classmates had talked about feeling unsafe, but Izuku thinks he feels fine, honestly. What happened was probably the worst case scenario, and they’d made it out, right?

Uraraka and Iida don't know where he goes during lunch when he says he needs some time alone. He brought his food with him, of course, a to-go container of Lunch Rush's katsudon, but he's not that hungry right now. The container is next to him, about a foot from the edge, and he's debating if he should make himself eat it now or be starving by the time he gets done with afternoon classes. It smells good, even through the plastic lid still snapped on top of the container.

It's probably because he's been training with Aizawa so much that he recognizes the sensation of his capture weapon immediately as it wraps around his waist, pulling him away from the ledge and dragging him a short ways across the roof before he stops. It's also because of his training that he manages to twist himself to face Aizawa, knowing just how he can push against the capture weapon without it tightening around him, so he sees the dark look on Aizawa's face even before the man speaks.

"Midoriya," he says, walking closer to Izuku without letting his capture weapon go slack, still tight around Izuku's midsection. "What are you doing?" His tone of voice implies he's already figured out what Izuku's doing, but he sounds angry, dark. It throws Izuku for a loop, and he blinks.

"I-I know the roof is, um, banned, but I-I just," he swallows, wriggling and trying to get free from the capture weapon. "I-I'm sorry, Aizawa-sensei, it's j-just so loud in the mess hall." He watches Aizawa's face flicker into something different, something almost relieved.

"You're up here because it's quiet?" he asks, voice soft, and Izuku nods, slowly.

"What did you think..." he trails off as it clicks, and he blinks. "Oh."

Aizawa sighs, retracting his capture weapon and wrapping it back around his neck. "Yeah, *oh* ." He glances to the side, where Izuku's lunch sits next to a pair of disposable chopsticks on the rooftop.

"S-Sorry," Izuku says again, offering his teacher a weak smile as he stands up. "I get, um, overwhelmed? I-In the cafeteria."

"Was it necessary to sit *right* on the edge?" Aizawa asks, sighing and folding his arms over his chest. Izuku honestly isn't sure how to explain that to him; it's not like he can just say *oh, I can't die, and it's kind of fun to be on the edge because of the adrenaline and stuff* .

"I like the view..." he says, and it comes out as more of a question. Aizawa arches an eyebrow at him, then shakes his head.

"Get your lunch and come with me," he says, watching as Izuku nods and walks back over toward the edge, picking up the still-warm container of food. He turns back to see Aizawa still watching him, and he doesn't turn to open the door into the building until Izuku is well away from the ledge. Izuku wonders if Aizawa thinks he's lying about why he's up here, or if he's just being cautious.

"W-Where are we going?" he asks as they walk down the stairs, Aizawa in front of Izuku. He can't see his teacher's face, and it's making him nervous.

"To the teachers' lounge," Aizawa answers. "It's pretty quiet in there, and if you eat at my desk, nobody will bother you."

"O-Oh," Izuku says, blinking. The idea of eating lunch with Aizawa makes him a little nervous, mostly because he still isn't entirely convinced the man doesn't hate him, but he can't deny that having somewhere to go when he needs quiet that isn't subject to the weather would be kind of nice.

"Did you pick the lock to get up there?" Aizawa asks as he stops at the second floor, opening the

door to the hallway and holding it open for Izuku. Izuku steps through then waits for Aizawa to follow.

“Um, y-yes, I-I’m sorry.” Izuku worries at his lower lip, but Aizawa just looks at him with a flat face.

“It’s locked for a reason,” Aizawa says, leading Izuku down the hallway a short way. Izuku knows where the teacher’s lounge is; all of the students know, so that they can ask for help or pick up graded papers.

“Sorry,” Izuku replies, because it’s all he can think to say as Aizawa opens the door to the teacher’s lounge. Izuku follows him in, trying not to drag his feet.

“I don’t care as long as you don’t fall off the roof,” Aizawa says, nodding to Midnight and Present Mic, who are each at their respective desks.

“Hey Shouta!” Present Mic says, waving. “What’s the little listener doing here?”

“Avoiding socialization,” Aizawa answers, and Izuku’s infinitely grateful he doesn’t mention the whole roof thing. He doesn’t need his teachers thinking he’s suicidal, because he isn’t, not *really*. It doesn’t count if he comes back, and it’ll make it harder for him to kill himself and get away with it if it comes down to it.

Aizawa leads him to the back corner of the room, to a desk that’s unreasonably cluttered for something so neat. Nearly every square inch of it is covered in papers and folders, but every single one is in a neat stack, and there isn’t a speck of dust on the desk. There’s a *couch* behind it, a beat up old thing, and in front of it are two normal chairs, like the ones from the classrooms.

Aizawa plops onto the couch, immediately laying down on it. Izuku sits in the chair, hesitantly. He’s not sure what to do, really.

“You can move anything in your way,” Aizawa says, one arm draped over his eyes. “I’m going to nap. Wake me up when lunch is over.”

Izuku eats his lunch there, listening to the soft sounds of his teacher breathing and the quiet chatter from the other side of the room. It’s peaceful in a different way than the roof for sure, but it’s nice.

Chapter End Notes

cw: just the normal stuff i think? bullying is talked about

i hope this satisfied our collective need for aizawa to stop being a DICK. ive been DYING to write some of these scenes. soon we're gonna hit the part that is really canon divergent djgkhdfj i just can't totally follow cnaon seeing as it's... yknow... not finished :) and at the rate im going ill be done before horikoshi is

gravel

Chapter Summary

last time: izuku starts training with aizawa, gets back to school after USJ, and talks with katsuki

Chapter Notes

hi hi hi!! sorry this one is so late in the day, i had a lot of stuff earlier on!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“The sports festival is coming up,” Aizawa says, looking bored where he sits at his desk. He’s tapping a pencil on the surface of the wood, resting his face on his hand. “It’s an important opportunity for you to attract the attention of hero agencies for your work studies, so I suggest you take preparations seriously.” Izuku watches as his teacher scans the classroom, making eye contact with Izuku briefly.

“I’m excited,” Uraraka whispers from beside him. “I honestly thought we wouldn’t get to participate this year.” She’s smiling, leaning over at her desk to talk to him. There’s no way that Aizawa can’t see; it’s not like she’s being subtle, but he doesn’t do anything about it. Izuku just nods in response, not wanting to talk during class.

He’d honestly thought that the sports festival would be cancelled, too, but as Aizawa had explained to them earlier that week, it’s too important for their future careers for them to cancel it. Izuku wonders, though, if it’ll really be okay. He remembers Kurogiri’s quirk all too well, and he knows from experience that if he wanted to invade the sports festival, he could. Shigaraki probably could as well, all on his own, too.

“I want you all to look through the tapes from past sports festivals and write me a one page report on a student who has a similar quirk or similar fighting style to yours,” Aizawa says. “Get it to me by homeroom tomorrow. Keep in mind that the first two events change every year, and that the third round is always a tournament with the matches determined by lottery, not performance.” He yawns, holding up a hand to his face. “I’m going to sleep.”

Izuku watches his teacher lean over on the desk and put his head down, presumably to nap. He’s not really thinking about his assignment, even though he probably should be, because he’s stuck on what Aizawa had just said about the third event. *Determined by lottery*, Izuku thinks, biting at his lower lip. *That means that if I reset, I’d get different matches every time*.

That’s if he decides to use his ability during the sports festival at *all*. Izuku’s thought about it, of course. Other students get to use their quirks, so it’s only fair, right? The problem is that Izuku is registered quirkless, and that for him to use his quirk, he’d have to either manage to get himself killed or kill himself quickly without getting interrupted, a feat that would probably be difficult considering the high security at the sports festival. He’s struck, not for the first time, how badly he needs a way to kill himself quickly and efficiently.

Izuku wishes he had his notebook with his analysis on his own quirk with him, but he doesn't dare to bring it to UA with him, in case somebody decides to go through his things. He's thought about it before, though, and he keeps coming back to the same few ideas.

The absolute best way for him to kill himself would probably be with a gun. He knows it's quick and efficient, and if someone tries to stop him, well, he's armed. The problem is *getting* a gun. He's done a ton of reading, and it's difficult for adults to get firearms in Japan, let alone a fifteen year old who doesn't appear to have any reason to want one. It would not only make him look incredibly suspicious if he was caught with it, but Izuku also doesn't think he'd be able to get one in the first place.

He thinks about knives, a lot. He has the ones he uses as Ace, but he doesn't dare risk carrying them with him in case someone makes the connection. He's thought about buying a couple of other ones, ones with sharp, thin blades. He could keep them with him and slit his wrists in the bathroom, but there's still the issue of bleeding out. It takes time, too much time when he cuts his arms like he has in the past. Izuku wonders if he'd be able to slit his own throat, if he has the guts to do it. He's felt his pulse point below, the steady thump of warm blood beneath his skin, nestled next to his windpipe. It doesn't feel that deep, doesn't feel like it would be hard to sever. *I'll have to test it out*, he thinks.

There's also poison, but that has the same issues that the guns do as far as getting his hands on some. He knows there are natural poisons, though, and he's sure with enough research, he could find a way to make something that would kill him. The issue is getting something that would kill him quickly and without risking the lives of others around him. He knows of things that kill quickly, but they're mostly gases, things he's only heard of because he's always been told not to mix cleaning chemicals together. Izuku thinks about spies in old American movies sometimes, the ones where when a spy is captured, they break a capsule in a fake tooth and die from cyanide poisoning in mere seconds. It would be convenient if he could do that, too, but he doesn't think he'd be able to get a cyanide tooth put in.

Jumping is nice, of course, because it's quick and once he jumps, it's hard for people to intervene. But from his research, Izuku is pretty sure that he's incredibly lucky not to have survived any of his falls thus far. If he lands wrong, if he jumps from a roof that's a little too low, he could be paralyzed, could be comatose. He could get as close to death as possible without dying, and as amazing as his quirk is, it can't fix that. Izuku needs to be more careful.

"What are you thinking about?" Uraraka's voice makes Izuku jump nearly out of his skin, the tops of his legs knocking against his desk. He swallows, turning to look at her, and sees her just barely suppressing a laugh.

"Sorry! I didn't mean to startle you," she says, grinning. "You were concentrating really hard! Are you worried about the sports festival?" Izuku blinks, forcing himself to remember that they were supposed to be working on a paper about the festival. He's glad for the reminder of what he's supposed to be thinking about--it's not like he could have told Uraraka he'd been fantasizing about new, creative ways to kill himself.

"Y-Yeah," he answers, drumming his fingers on the cool surface of his desk. "I don't want to do poorly."

Uraraka nods, an understanding look on her face. "I'm nervous about the media attention," she says, looking a little embarrassed. "I know we're just first years, but with the USJ incident, it feels like people already want to know about us..."

Izuku nods, humming in agreement. "We're definitely going to have a lot of eyes on us," he

answers. “But it might not be such a bad thing. We’ll have a better chance of getting good work studies that way, right?”

“Yeah!” Uraraka nods. “I’m going to do my best and put my all in,” she says, holding up a closed fist.

Kaminari turns, from where he, Kirishima, Ashido, Sero, and Kacchan are sitting and talking. “You two should train with us,” he says, grinning. “We’re doing Bakugou boot camp.”

“Don’t call it that,” Kacchan hisses, arms crossed over his chest. “And I didn’t say you could invite whoever the hell you want, fucking pikachu.”

“It’s okay though, isn’t it?” Ashido says, nudging Kacchan’s shoulder with her elbow. “Midoriya’s getting special training from Aizawa-sensei, so he can show us some moves too!”

Izuku feels his face heat up. “I-It’s not anything s-special, really!” He sees Ashido give him a wide grin.

“But you’ll show us your moves, right? You were kind of badass at USJ, even when you were so sick!” She stands up, miming a punch. “Yaomomo told us all about it!”

Kaminari nods eagerly. “You must have like, *insane* pain tolerance dude. She said you were puking *blood* and you were still all up in Shigaraki’s grill!” He grins at Izuku, and Izuku can see the rest of their little group looking at him, Kacchan included. His childhood friend is eyeing him out of the corners of his eyes, a look on his face that Izuku knows means he’s thinking.

“Um... If y-you’re sure it’s okay for us to join...” Izuku looks at Kacchan, who huffs a long breath of air.

“Fine. But you two better not fucking complain when I beat your asses into the ground.” Kacchan meets Izuku’s gaze with his red eyes, and Izuku gives him a small smile. Kacchan tsks and turns away, but it’s enough for Izuku.

“Wow,” Uraraka says, rubbing the back of her neck. “Is it weird that I’m both nervous and excited?”

Kirishima laughs at that. “Dude, you’re right to be nervous! Studying with Bakugou is an extreme sport normally. Imagine how he’ll be with physical stuff.”

“It’s not an extreme sport, shitty hair,” Kacchan growls, turning to glare at him. “You just don’t have any fucking discipline.” Kacchan’s scowl deepens when Kirishima just laughs in response, and Kaminari and Ashido join in, giggling at Kacchan’s dark expression.

Izuku thinks that, maybe, the sports festival will be okay. Maybe he’ll train like the rest of his friends, read up on techniques and practice with Aizawa until he’s good at combat and in good shape. Maybe he’ll get through the first two events without having to kill himself. Maybe he’ll even get far enough in the tournament that he won’t feel the need to slip away afterwards, won’t feel the need to dig the tip of a knife into the belly of his arms. He doesn’t have to *win*, right? He just has to do good enough to get a work study. It’ll be okay.

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The city is quiet except for the usual sounds, the gentle whisper of the wind between the buildings, the soft pulse of distant music, the occasional grinding of car tires over asphalt. Izuku slips between the buildings, moves through the streets like a ghost, hugging the shadows. Since he’d started to

get media attention, even if it was just a little, he's been more careful to move stealthily. He's only had people recognize him once or twice, but he doesn't want to push it if he can help it.

Tonight, he's extra careful because he's following someone. He's seen this man a few times before, always clinging to the shadows and avoiding the busiest streets. He's got dyed hair, platinum blonde with black showing where his roots have started to grow out, but what first caught Izuku's eye was his clothing. Despite hugging the edges of the streets, despite staying hidden, he wears a neat, dark grey suit with a blue undershirt and a white tie. It fits him well, and Izuku has only ever seen him dressed that way. He's never out more than two days in a row, always carrying a large, black duffel bag with him and wearing black leather gloves. He's also got tattoos, the mark of something geometric rising just above the collar of his shirt, climbing up the back of his neck. Izuku doesn't think any of these things on their own would make him suspicious, but together, they do. He's not sure, of course, but something about the way the man moves and the way he dresses reminds him of the green haired villain, the one with the portal quirk.

It's only making him more suspicious, now that he's following the guy past his normal patrol route. He's walking quickly enough that Izuku's having a hard time keeping pace with him without getting caught, but so far he's managed to avoid being seen. They're starting to walk to the edge of this part of the city, though, close to an industrial area that is mostly deserted this time of night. The gaps between the buildings are getting wider, and there are less and less noises that Izuku can use to cover his footsteps, and it's making his heart quicken in his throat, dancing a frantic beat against his skin.

He watches the man turn onto a side road, one that's mostly loose gravel poured over old, cracked asphalt, and Izuku has to slow his pace to prevent his boots from crunching against the ground. The man he's following seems to be more confident here, less afraid of being seen. He's walking faster, more confidently. Izuku slips off the side of the road, walking in the thick grass that lines the left side of it. It still makes more noise than Izuku is comfortable with, but it's a soft, swishing sound and not the distinct noise of footsteps. Izuku will take what he can get.

This is a part of the city that Izuku hasn't been to. It's abandoned, for the most part, with warehouses that stand sullen and silent against the night sky. The ground is less smooth concrete and well-trafficked asphalt, instead made up mostly of light grey gravel and rough, cracked pavement. The fences that surround the parking areas for the warehouses, that guard the outdoor storage, are topped with razor wire, neat curls of metal that shine a dark grey in the light. Some of the fences are chain link, rusty where the strands of dull metal intersect. It makes Izuku nervous in a way that his part of the city, the part that talks even in the dead of night and stays up until the sun is rising in the morning, does not.

The man he's following stops, suddenly, outside of a small building made of metal sheeting, looking almost like it's meant to be temporary. It doesn't look like it's new, though, and Izuku can see scratches and rust on the parts of the building where the metal isn't painted a dark blue like the rest of it. There are no windows, and the door is a solid thing without a peephole, but Izuku can see light coming out from underneath it, a thin line of dull yellow.

Izuku ducks aside, hovering in the shadow of an eighteen wheeler parked outside the nearest fence. The building is outside the fence, too, but the back end of it is touching the chain link, the razor wire bent out of the way for the little structure. Izuku tries to breathe as quietly as possible as he lowers himself to the ground, scooting under the truck and pressing his belly to the gravel below. He can see the man from his nose down at this angle, and it's good enough for Izuku to see him knock on the door. He says something, his mouth moving, but Izuku can't make out the words. It almost sounds like he's singing.

The door opens, spilling dull light onto the man in the suit and casting strange shadows onto the ground. Izuku braces himself to get up, to go over to listen at the door, but to his surprise, instead of the man going inside, somebody steps out. They're taller than the man and wearing strange shoes, large platform boots that shine a dull, purplish grey in the light. They're made of metal, Izuku realizes, as a woman steps out from the building and shuts the door behind her. She's dressed similarly to the man, wearing a black suit and a pale grey undershirt along with a purple tie, but she has odd metal bands around her wrists, biceps, and just above her knees. Izuku can't see any more than the tip of her chin and her long, black hair, pulled back in a low ponytail, but he strains, trying to hear what she says.

"...have it?" She asks, voice low. Izuku can barely make out what she's saying.

"Yes ma'am," the man answers, kneeling down and setting his duffel bag down on the gravel. He unzips it, and Izuku leans forward, trying to see what's inside, but he can't make it out. The man pulls out two things, a manila folder stuffed thick with papers and a disc, a shiny silver CD in a clear plastic case. He holds them up, and the woman takes them with a pale hand, each finger adorned in a ring that matches the bands covering her body.

"And the rest of it?" She asks, tapping one foot. The metal looks *heavy*, and Izuku wonders if it's something to do with her quirk. Otherwise, it would be inconvenient.

"Next week," the man says, zipping the bag back up. There's clearly more in it, and Izuku wonders if there's another location he's taking it to, or if he keeps his own supplies in the bag as well.

"Fine," the woman says, and it sounds like she's forcing it out around gritted teeth. "But if you don't have it by next time, Fury is going to want to see you and I'm not going to try and stop him." Izuku can see the way the man tenses up at the name, *Fury*, the way he draws his hand back away from his bag, the way his eyes glitter with fear before he stands up, taking a small step back.

"I-I'll have it next time," he says, his words shaky. "You don't have to send him."

"*I'm* the one keeping him from you," the woman says, folding her hands over her chest. "And I'm the one paying the price for your poor performance. Now, scram." She picks up one foot, like she's going to kick him but too slowly for it to be an actual attack. The man seems to get the idea, though, and he picks up his bag, quickly walking away. Izuku watches him, tracking his motions from where he's laying under the truck. The man is moving frantically, quickly, and he thankfully doesn't seem to notice Izuku.

Izuku almost relaxes, but then he hears the crunch of a shoe on gravel and he turns to see the woman walking toward the truck, her heavy boots growing closer to him. Izuku holds his breath, praying that it's a coincidence, that she hasn't noticed, but her movements are too direct, too confident for that.

"Now," she says, crouching down. "What do we have here?" Izuku doesn't have time to react as her hand shoots out, cold fingers wrapping around his wrist and *yanking*, pulling his head and shoulders out from under the truck. The gravel digs into his belly and chest even through his shirt, and he looks up, already trying to pull himself free from her grip.

She's wearing a mask made of that same dark metal, a shaped, smooth mask that starts just above her upper lip and covers her entire face, with thin, angled ovals over where her eyes are. Izuku can just see the glitter of her eyes through the gaps, and as far as he can tell, nothing is holding the mask to her face. Her hair is smooth and even, and tucked into her hair is a headband that holds up two metal rabbit ears, thin pieces of metal that look sharp on the edges. They should be *heavy*, even as thin as they are, but they seem weightless, moving effortlessly as she tilts her head at him,

lips twisting into a frown.

“Aren’t you...?” She reaches for his face, and Izuku jerks his head out of the way, kicking against the ground and trying to pull himself out of her grip. She just sighs, and the bruising grip on his wrist tightens, her rings digging into his skin with painful force. He can’t pull himself away as she reaches her other hand up to his face and tugs off his mask with long, thin fingers.

“Let me go ,” he hisses, snapping at her fingers with his teeth as she reaches for his goggles, next.

“Or what?” She says, unphased. “Stop moving so much, or I’ll have to break your wrist.” Izuku snarls at her, still trying to pull away, as she grabs his goggles and yanks them off of his face, knocking his hair out of the ponytail as she does.

He doesn’t know what he’s expecting, but it isn’t for her to jerk back in surprise. She blinks, visible just barely through the mask, then drops his wrist. She stares at him for a moment as he scrambles back, trying to put distance between them. Izuku can’t help the way he’s breathing hard, the way his heart is trying to push itself out of his chest. He feels *naked* without his mask and goggles, and he can already see the ring of dark bruises starting to form on his wrist.

She stands up, only visible from the knees down from Izuku’s position under the truck, but he can hear her sigh, can see her hands brushing gravel off of her dress pants. She stands there for a moment, seemingly waiting for something, then starts to walk away.

“Don’t get caught again,” she says as she goes, so quiet Izuku has to strain his ears to hear. “I won’t be so kind the next time.” Izuku watches, waits until she steps back into the building, slamming the door shut behind her. Even then, he stays under the truck for a few more minutes, listening to the sound of his own breath coming hot and fast in his ears, to the way his heart slowly creeps back to a normal pace. His wrist aches, and he’s covered with a thin sheen of sweat, more beading up on his forehead as he reaches out with his uninjured hand, carefully tugging his goggles back under the truck and putting them on, sliding them over his hair. He takes his mask next, putting it on and feeling better with it on.

It takes him an embarrassing amount of time to slip out from under the truck and get back home, but he doesn’t want to take any risks. He moves so slowly, so carefully, letting the pain in his swollen wrist remind him of his close call.

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The next day, Izuku has training with Aizawa. He wears his long sleeved uniform with a hoodie over it, even though it’s a little too warm to justify the hoodie. It covers the ring of bruises around his wrist, a bloom of dark violet and red that’s typical of a fresh bruise. It’s the worst over the bone, where it sticks out near his thumb, the tissue there is swollen and hot. If Izuku looks closely, he can see the imprints of her rings in the bruise, showing up as darker, more red areas of the bruise.

He’s moving slower than normal, not as quick to block, and he knows Aizawa has noticed. It’s obvious from the way that Aizawa is going easy on him, giving him more warning before he throws a hit for Izuku to block, stopping to instruct Izuku on his form more often. Izuku can only hope that Aizawa just thinks he’s tired from “Bakugou boot camp,” as the others had been calling it. They’d mostly been going for runs together and lifting weights in the gym as a group, but Kacchan insists that it’s going to get harder after their upcoming exam in English. He’d said that Kirishima and Ashido would fail if he gave them any excuse to slack off on their studies, so he was going easy on them. That’s what he’d said, anyway. Izuku personally thinks that he’d noticed the way a few of them were a little out of shape, that Kacchan was adapting his plan to get them up to

speed.

Izuku is dragged out of his thinking by Aizawa throwing a kick to Izuku's left side, something that he moves instinctively to block with his left forearm. He misses the mark a little, though, his movement slowed by the stiffness in his muscles from being out patrolling all night, from having crouched under that truck for so long. Aizawa's kick, well placed and controlled, hits Izuku's arm right where the outside of his arm meets the wrist, against the angry bruise he has hidden there. It blooms with bright, angry pain, and Izuku sees white flash at the edges of his vision as he leans over, clutching his wrist in his hand and shutting his eyes shut against the wave of pain.

"Midoriya?" He cracks one eye open to see Aizawa standing in front of him, brow furrowed. "Let me see," he says, holding a hand out. His gaze is trained on Izuku's arm where he's cradling it to his chest, but Izuku just shakes his head.

"I-It's fine," he says, even though his lip is wobbling slightly. He forces himself to uncurl from his arm, puts his fists back up in some semblance of a fighting stance. "I can keep going."

Aizawa sighs, then reaches out lightning-quick and grabs Izuku's hand, pulling his arm down and pulling the sleeve of his hoodie up with his other hand. Izuku struggles back, and Aizawa lets him pull his arm away, but the damage is already done. Izuku's hoodie sleeve is pushed up to his elbow, and his sports uniform doesn't cover the bracelet of bruises around his wrist. It looks even worse in the bright fluorescent light of the gym, and Izuku feels anxiety rise in his throat as Aizawa meets his eyes.

"You need to tell me if you're injured," he says, voice firm. "*Before* we start training." His gaze flickers down to Izuku's wrist as Izuku carefully wraps his other hand around it. "Who did that to you?" There's an undercurrent of something in Aizawa's voice, something Izuku can't place.

"N-Nobody," Izuku says, shaking his head. His blood is rushing in his ears, and he takes a step away from Aizawa.

"It's shaped like a handprint," Aizawa says, voice dull and serious. "Was it your mother?" His face is grim, his lips a thin line.

"No!" Izuku shouts, eyes wide in surprise. "My mother would n-never." Aizawa just nods, seeming to believe him.

"Someone at school, then?" Aizawa tilts his head slightly to the side. "Bakugou?"

Izuku shakes his head quickly. "I-It wasn't anyone here," he answers, tugging his hoodie sleeve back down. "It's okay, really," he tries, looking up at Aizawa with a pleading glance. "It looks worse than it is."

"I doubt it," Aizawa says, stepping toward Izuku. Izuku backs away, his heartbeat fluttering in his throat and his breath hitching. Aizawa seems to notice, pausing.

"Can I go?" Izuku blurts out, his gaze flickering to the door and then back at Aizawa. He feels cornered, even though there's nothing behind him and he isn't trapped here, not like he was under that truck. He knows Aizawa wouldn't hurt him, not on purpose, but he doesn't want anyone's hand on his wrist right now.

"You can go to Recovery Girl," Aizawa says, sighing. "I'll come with you."

"I-I can go alone," Izuku says, and Aizawa glares at him in response, walking past Izuku, towards the door out of the gym.

The walk to Recovery Girl's office is silent, and with Aizawa staying just a few steps ahead of Izuku, enough that he would surely hear if Izuku tried to make a break for it. Izuku knows better than that, anyway. The sun is setting behind the trees at the edge of campus, and it gives the shadows that dust across the ground a strange look, like they're painted onto the ground. Izuku watches them all the way to the building that houses the infirmary, stepping onto the tile floor as Aizawa holds the door open for him.

Recovery Girl's office door is shut, but Aizawa walks up to it anyway, pulling a key from his pocket and unlocking the door with a soft click.

"Is she here?" Izuku asks as Aizawa pushes the door open, revealing a dark room inside. Aizawa glances back at him as he reaches a hand inside, flicking on a light switch.

"It appears not. I'm not a doctor, but I know enough to see if it's sprained and to get you some ice for it," Aizawa says, stepping into the infirmary. Izuku hangs back for just a second before following him, wishing he'd just killed himself and reset the injury away last night. He'd thought about it, but he'd woken his mom up when he came home, and he didn't want her to walk in on him partway through and he certainly didn't want to sneak out again, not so close to when he needed to wake up. *Stupid*, he thinks. *I'm only in this situation because I was too lazy to fix things myself.*

Izuku stands in the infirmary, most of the lights still off, and watches Aizawa rummage around in a drawer. The man turns back toward him with an elastic bandage in his hand, and he walks back toward Izuku.

"Let me see it," he says, face blank and impassive. Izuku swallows and offers the wrist, knowing better than to try and argue. Aizawa tucks the bandage under his armpit and takes Izuku's wrist, his touch gentle and light, almost not there. He tugs up Izuku's hoodie sleeve, and Izuku wonders if he imagines the slight frown on Aizawa's face.

"I'm going to press on it in a few places," Aizawa says, glancing up and making eye contact with Izuku. Izuku just nods, feeling his face flush in embarrassment. Aizawa doesn't seem to notice though, looking back down at Izuku's wrist and pressing calloused fingers around the joint. The pressure aches, and Izuku can't but hiss at the pain. Aizawa moves quickly, turning his wrist around and examining it, bending Izuku's hand in all directions with soft touches.

"It's just badly bruised," Aizawa says, pulling his hands away and taking out the bandage from under his arm. "I'm going to wrap it, and you should ice it and keep it elevated. You're right handed, right?"

Izuku nods, faintly surprised. Aizawa takes his hand again, deftly wrapping the bandage around the injured joint. The fabric feels rough and painful against Izuku's irritated skin, but the compression helps, makes it feel less raw and hot.

"Good, you'll be able to write, then." He tucks the end of the bandage under a loop, finishing the wrap. "I'll get you some ice for the train ride home," he says, turning and walking back towards the fridge-freezer in the back of the room. Izuku watches him for a moment, then drops his gaze to stare at his wrist, wrapped carefully in beige fabric.

"Sensei?" he asks, barely above a whisper.

"Yeah?" Aizawa answers, turning back to him with an ice pack in hand.

"Sorry," Izuku whispers, dropping his gaze to the floor. He hears Aizawa's steps on the tile, then a

soft sigh.

“Don’t apologize. Just tell me next time you’re hurt.” Izuku looks up at him, and Aizawa meets his gaze with a serious expression. “And Midoriya, you can talk to me if something is going on.”

Izuku just nods, ignoring the tears welling in his eyes as he accepts the ice pack from his teacher.

Chapter End Notes

i hope you enjoyed!! i know not everyone likes original characters, so i'm trying to keep them to a minimum, but given the nature of this fic i need OC villains to make it work! i hope that nobody minds too too much! im excited for this next bit and the sports festival, which should be fun to write :3

rooftops and recon

Chapter Summary

last time: izuku gets caught by a villain and... let go. aizawa sees the bruise on his arm.

Chapter Notes

hi hi!!! it's a little bit shorter of an update today, but i think this way we'll have one more chapter before the sports festival! just a reminder that if you need content warnings, please check the author's notes before reading the chapter! i put them there to avoid spoilers, and if you want to search for a specific keyword, you can use ctrl + f and search for your triggers/what you need warnings for, that way it'll tell you if that term shows up in the end notes (or in the chapter!)

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Izuku sits on the rooftop, legs dangling over the edge as he watches the city move and breathe. It's dark out tonight, a new moon, so even though the skies are clear, the roof is only lit from the lights below, not above. Izuku likes it, though, and he feels like in the dark red and black of his Ace costume, he can hide in the shadows here, disappear into nothing. He thinks about Hagakure, about her quirk, and wonders what kind of insane stealth missions he'd be able to pull off with a quirk like that.

For one thing, it'd be easier to sit on rooftops without getting interrupted. He sees Eraserhead's capture weapon before he sees the man himself. The fabric grips onto the edge of the roof, and Izuku watches as Eraserhead uses it to propel himself onto the top of the building.

"Ace," Eraserhead says, his expression hard to place with his goggles on.

"Eraser," Izuku answers because it seems fitting. He watches Aizawa turn to look in the direction Izuku had been facing, looking out over the city.

"What are you doing up here?" He asks, and it doesn't sound accusing or urgent. It's different from when Aizawa the teacher found Izuku the student on the roof, somehow. It's almost like Eraserhead trusts Ace, in a way he doesn't trust Izuku. *Or, Izuku thinks he just isn't responsible for my well being as Ace the same way he is when I'm his student.*

"Watching," Izuku replies, turning his head away from Eraserhead and looking back over at the city. It's quiet tonight, and that's why he came up here in the first place, hoping to see something that tips him off to a conflict below.

"Hmm," Eraserhead hums in response. "You remind me of one of my students." It takes everything Izuku has to not react when Eraserhead says that, forcing himself to continue breathing easily and not moving his gaze from the city.

Eraser seems unsurprised by Izuku's silence. "I teach high school," he says, moving to stand beside

Izuku on the ledge. “You’re high school age, aren’t you.” It isn’t a question. Izuku doesn’t answer, anyway. He swings his legs, knocking his boots against the side of the building. He wonders if this is Eraserhead fishing for information, or if he already suspects Izuku and this is his way of telling him that. Izuku doesn’t want to give anything away, doesn’t want to confirm any of his theories.

“I’m fifty-six, actually,” Izuku deadpans, leaning forward to rest his elbows on his knees.

Eraserhead snorts. “Right,” he says, and Izuku can *hear* the way he’s rolling his eyes. “Well. I’ll leave you to it.” The pro hero turns, walking away, and Izuku watches him go.

“Wait,” Izuku says, hesitating. He watches Eraserhead pause, sees him turn back from where he’d been preparing to jump to the next rooftop.

Izuku swallows, and says, “Do you know anything about a villain named Fury?” He watches Eraser stare at him for a moment, then sees him marching toward him.

“Where did you hear that name?” Eraserhead asks, stopping a few feet away from Izuku. His tone of voice is demanding, harsh. It reminds Izuku of when Aizawa scolds them in class.

Izuku shrugs, even though his heart has started to beat faster in his chest. “I heard it on the streets,” he says, watching as Eraserhead stares him down, eyes barely visible through the slits in his goggles.

“Stay away from him and anyone who mentions him,” Eraserhead orders. “It’s too dangerous.”

Izuku blinks, remembering the woman with the rabbit ears and the metal mask. She’d let him go. *She’d seen my face*, he remembers, his mouth going dry when he thinks about her, about her hand on his wrist and the way he was very nearly *captured*. His quirk can do many things, but it can’t set him free if he can’t kill himself and nobody else will do the job for him.

“I think it’s too late for that,” Izuku whispers, and he sees Eraser’s lips turn into a scowl.

“What did you do?” Eraserhead asks, and he sounds so much like Aizawa the teacher in that moment that Izuku almost laughs. He doesn’t though, just shrugs his shoulders.

“I don’t know much right now,” he says, not answering Aizawa’s question. “But I’ll give you the information when I have a better idea of what’s going on.”

“I *just* said to stay away,” Aizawa hisses. “Fury and his men are not something you want to play around with.”

Izuku snorts. “What are they going to do, kill me?” He can’t help himself, but the way Aizawa raises a hand to massage his temples does make him feel a little guilty.

“*Yes*,” he grits out. “Or worse. You’re a *child*. Leave this to the pros.”

Izuku shrugs, looking away from him and back toward the view. “I’ll be careful.” He swings his legs, his heels hitting the side of the building again.

He hears Aizawa sigh, deep and long-suffering. “Here,” he says, and Izuku glances up to see him pulling a small card out of one of his pockets, holding it out to him. “I would rather you not get involved at all, but if you need to call for backup, my number is on there.” Izuku reaches up, hesitant, and takes the card. He looks over it. It’s simple, black text on white paper, and all it says is Eraserhead’s hero name, his phone number, and the number of the agency he works with. Izuku sticks it in his hoodie pocket and looks back up at Eraserhead, who’s just standing there, hands in

his pockets as the wind whips the hair around his face.

“Thanks,” Izuku says, and Aizawa nods, turning to face the edge of the roof, where Izuku’s facing.

“Thank me by not dying,” Aizawa replies, and Izuku knows that’s one thing he won’t be able to do.

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Izuku isn’t exactly sure why he starts cutting himself outside of resetting, but he doesn’t like to think too hard about it. He’s learned that it’s best not to press himself on these things; if he worries about why he gets anxious when he doesn’t kill himself after a week or so since the last time or why he presses his fingers into the bruises he accumulates at training or why he starts to cut little lines into the skin just above his elbow, well, he panics. If he doesn’t question them, doesn’t make himself think about it, everything stays okay, stays calm. Izuku knows ignoring the issue probably isn’t the *best* way of handling things, but it’s *working* , so he tries not to stress himself out over it.

He has to admit that it’s a little pathetic, though, when instead of going to the roof or to the cafeteria or even to the teacher’s lounge, he’s spending today’s lunch period locked in the bathroom, in a private stall. He doesn’t have his knives with him, of course; he never brings them to class. But from his reading online, his private tabs with questions like *quickest way to kill yourself* and *efficient and silent suicide methods* , he’s learned that a lot of people don’t *have* knives like he does. They get by with things like safety razors, with the blades stolen from pencil sharpeners and craft blades they bought from the art store.

Izuku has a blade that he bought from a drugstore; it’s the kind for shaving, but he doesn’t really have to shave, so he probably looked silly buying it. It’s okay, though, because it’s actually really nice for when he kills himself by bleeding out. It’s much, much sharper than his knives, and the blade is so thin that it’s bendable, so he can easily conceal it in a little pillbox that he keeps in the pockets of his uniform. It’s his current way of ensuring he can kill himself quickly if he needs to, even though bleeding out in general is kind of slow. He’s wanted to practice slicing his own throat, but every time he’s gone to try, he’s gotten nervous and decided not to. It’s stupid; it’s not like he hasn’t slit his wrists before. It should be easy for him.

That was when he’d first started to do *this* , the kind of cutting himself that doesn’t kill him. He’d been frustrated at himself for not being willing to slit his throat, and he’d had his knives out already, and he’d done what he did that one time in the bathtub, cutting little non-lethal cuts into the flesh of his arm. That time, though, it hadn’t been a warm up to kill himself. He’d let the wounds stay there for a few hours, then killed himself by getting into the bath and opening up his left arm. When he’d woken back up, they’d been healed, and he had an extra couple of hours to study for English, so he thinks that really, there was no harm done.

The thing is, he keeps doing it. He keeps catching himself thinking about dying at times where it would make things *harder* , not easier. Like when he’d just walked home in the rain and if he died, he’d probably have to walk home again. Or when he’d already sat through class and he wasn’t going to make himself sit through it again, not when he’d understood everything the first time through. So he couldn’t kill himself, fine. It’s not like Izuku really wants the death part, specifically. There’s just something intoxicating about the way his body feels in those last few moments before death, where he’s running out of blood or he’s filled with adrenaline and falling from a height. He’s read about how the body stops all pain moments before death, since there’s no point in it any more, and he thinks it’s got to be something like that.

Cutting himself like he is now, in little cuts that bleed in small crimson beads instead of dripping, flowing blood, isn’t the same, but it’s the closest he’s felt. It’s like a tiny piece of that relief he gets

right before dying, a tiny amount of clarity and peace. He's started using it as a substitute, and he figures it's technically better for him, right? His quirk does *something* to certain cells of his body, and while that hasn't been an issue for him since USJ, he figures it's better not to push it.

That's why he's here now, in the bathroom closest to class 1-A because he didn't want to wait any longer than he absolutely had to. He feels like there's lightning under his skin, prickling his nerves and begging to be let out. The sharp sensation of the razor digging into his skin--not quite pain, but something else--is soothing, familiar. He breathes out in the bathroom stall, his breath shaky and uneven. A soft, warm feeling nestles itself under his collarbone, and he leans back, tipping his head so that he's staring at the ceiling tiles, the white and grey above him. He wonders if this is what doing drugs feels like; if so, he thinks he might understand the appeal.

Izuku puts his razor away, tucking it into the little pill box and putting it back into his pants pocket. The tiny cuts on his upper arm are still leaking bright blood, little lines of the stuff running down the back of his arm and threatening to drip onto the floor. Izuku grabs a handful of toilet paper and mops it up, watching the way the blood has already coagulated on the surface. It's strange, not at all like the blood in movies or drawings, and he wonders if it's just hard to fake this, the strange clotting and the too-bright, opaque look to it.

Izuku pulls his uniform sleeve down, over the raw cuts in his skin, and stands up. The bathroom is still empty as he swings his backpack over his shoulder and unlocks the stall, all signs of what he'd done hidden.

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It's a dreary, chilly evening when Izuku sees the white haired villain again, with that same suit from the week before. He remembers what the woman he'd met had said--that he needed whatever he was supposed to collect before their next meeting--and Izuku can only assume that if he wants to know what the man is trying to get, this will be his only chance. So, he's in his costume, following the man yet again. It's a risk that's worth taking, he's decided, and if it looks like the man is going back to that strange building in the industrial area, Izuku will just leave. He doesn't want to risk seeing that woman again, not when he'd been stupid enough to not reset after she saw his face.

Izuku steps carefully along the sidewalk, keeping about a block behind the villain. He knows he's conspicuous in this outfit, so it's best for the villain to not lay eyes on him at all. Today, he's headed the opposite direction from when Izuku had followed him the week before, and it's reassuring to know that Izuku isn't too late to see him doing whatever it is that's so important to Fury or whoever.

The air is crisp and cool in a way that it hasn't been in a while, and the cold front that had blown through that afternoon brought a cold, drizzling rain with it, the kind that Izuku can't really tell from a thick fog until he notices how wet his clothing is. It helps, because it provides a faint blanket of white noise to keep Izuku's footsteps disguised and it makes it harder to see, which both helps Izuku stay hidden among the shadows and makes it more difficult for him to stay with the villain he's following.

That pale fog hangs around the building that the villain stops at, a hero agency that Izuku is vaguely familiar with. The heroes who work here mostly specialize in rescues from car accidents and in managing accidental quirk-related incidents--the kinds of stuff that needs to be done but isn't as glamorous as fighting villains and pulling children from burning buildings. Izuku'd done a ton of reading on them in middle school, for a project that he'd gotten a B on because he "should look to other career paths." He hasn't been here in person before, though, and it's a nicer part of town, not at all where the white haired villain usually lurks. Izuku nestles himself into the closest

alleyway, pressing his back to the wall of one building and turning his head to peer out into the street so that he can watch the white haired villain work.

The man sets down his duffel bag beside the door, and Izuku can hear the soft thump it makes even from here. This looks like the back door to the building, anyway; there are a couple of empty parking spots, and there aren't any signs on this part of it. The door is padlocked shut, and Izuku wonders how the man will break in.

The man reaches up, feeling along the edge of the door with a gloved hand. He moves slowly but surely, like he's not afraid of being caught. After a moment of investigating the door's hinges, he retracts his hand and stops for a moment, doing something with his hands in front of him, his body blocking Izuku's view. Izuku bites his lip, tempted to move forward, but stops when he sees the man lift his hand again, this time without a glove covering it.

He brushes his hand along one hinge of the door, and Izuku sees a reflective, slippery-looking substance coat the metal, a shiny layer of something that glistens in faint rainbow hues, with small bubbles in it. It looks like soap, almost, and Izuku watches the man use his quirk to coat both of the hinges in the stuff, then slide his glove back on to cover his skin. He reaches up one hand to the top of the hinge, where the pin holds it together. Izuku holds his breath as the man effortlessly pries apart the hinge, the soapy stuff he'd coated it with apparently lubricating it to the point where it's easy to tug apart with one hand. The door shifts, leaning at the top, and the man crouches down slightly to undo the other hinge. The door pops away from its frame, twisting itself loose with its own weight, and Izuku watches the man reach up to support it, angling it so that it doesn't fall down completely, just hangs open about two feet. It's silent, nearly completely, and Izuku is struck by the fact that this may not be the first hero agency this man has broken into.

He watches the man pick up his duffel bag and slip into the darkness inside the building, disappearing into the darkness. Izuku waits, counts to ten, then follows, quickly walking from his alleyway towards the building. He listens around the sound of his heart pumping in his ears as he slips inside, ducking to the side so his shadow won't be in the doorway while he waits for his eyes to adjust to the darkness.

When his eyes adjust, Izuku sees a table covered with papers with a few chairs around it, a fridge in the back of the room, and a door leading out of the room, ajar with a thin cast of pale light spilling down the hallway. The doorway is next to the fridge, which has a big calendar on it and a piece of paper that reads "LABEL YOUR FOOD," underlined four times in thick, bold marker. It's pretty clearly a break room, but what concerns Izuku is the fact that there only appears to be the one door out of the room. It'll be hard for him to keep himself hidden this way.

He presses on anyway, sliding his boots against the tile so that he doesn't make footsteps as he moves forward. He slides into the hallway easily, and he can see that there are multiple offices branching off from the hall, each with a plexiglass window, a nameplate, and a door. Most of them are dark, with the doors closed, but the first one on the left has a cool, pale light filtering through the window. Izuku presses himself to the thin sliver of wall between the door he'd just come through and the window and tilts his head to look into the office.

He can't see much, but he can see a computer screen, the source of the light, and the silhouette of the villain he'd followed into the place. The edges of the man's bleached white hair glow with the illumination from the screen, and Izuku can see that he's downloading files, the file explorer on the computer open. Izuku strains, squinting his eyes, but he can't read the text on the screen to see what the man is downloading. He watches the progress bar, a green line, grow closer and closer to the end, but he doesn't move until it flashes green twice and the man moves, reaching to a box that must be the computer itself and yanking out a flash drive, a thin black rectangle. Izuku doesn't

hesitate, ducking out from his hiding spot and dashing down the short distance to the door.

He moves as quickly as he can without making noise, tucking himself back into that same alleyway he'd watched from as the man broke into the agency. He doesn't wait pressed against the wall, this time, instead jumping up and curling his fingers around the bricks surrounding a closed window on the side of the building. The brick is cool and damp, and it digs into the skin of his fingers as he hauls himself up, quickly pulling his legs up so that he can stand on the window sill. He reaches up to the next story's window sill, cursing mentally when his fingers slip for just the briefest moment before he manages to catch himself, one arm swinging to the side. Falling now would be disastrous; not only would it make noise, but it wouldn't kill him. Thankfully, Izuku manages to drag himself onto the angled, shingled roof of the building, a little two story thing.

He watches, pressed to the damp red shingles as the man slides the door back into its place, carefully replacing the pins that hold the hinges in place. He doesn't seem to be rushing, and Izuku can see a small smile on the man's face as he steps away, turning and picking up his bag before walking away from the building. Izuku watches him go, not daring to follow him lest he meet with that woman again.

--

"I'm going to *die* ," Ashido moans from where she's face down on the floor of the gym, her cheek against the mat.

"No you're fucking not," Kacchan hisses from above her, poking her side with his sneakered foot. "Get your lazy ass up and do your last set."

Izuku smiles from where he's sitting on a bench, his face plastered with sweat and his hands wrapped around his water bottle where it sits on his lap. "It's best to just get it over with," he tells Ashido.

"Easy for you to say!" Kaminari cuts in from where he's lying on his back on the ground, a sweat rag draped over his face. "You were at least in shape *before* this. You have no idea what it's like for the rest of us. We're going to *die* and the blood will be on Bakugou's evil, evil hands."

Izuku giggles, covering his mouth with one hand as Kacchan whips his head around to glare at him. His childhood friend takes a threatening step toward him, holding a ten pound dumbbell in one hand.

"What's so fucking funny, Deku?" He hisses. "Do you want to do an extra set?" He points at the dumbbell as he starts doing bicep curls aggressively, and Izuku just laughs harder, shaking his head and leaning forward as he tries to contain his fit of giggles.

"Give me that," Kirishima says, walking over and hip-checking Kacchan with a grin. "You're gonna blow it up if you keep doing that without gloves on."

"No I fucking won't!" Kacchan snarls, dropping the dumbbell into Kirishima's waiting hand and stomping away, explosions crackling from his palms. He stops a short distance away, lobbing a particularly large explosion at a rubber training dummy. Izuku winces in sympathy for the poor thing; it's already burned and blackened in places from being Kacchan's outlet for his sweat.

Kacchan whirls around and points at Ashido as soon as he's done burning the extra nitroglycerin

off of his palms. “Pinky! Get up and do your last set, or I’ll fucking kill you!” He starts marching towards her, and Izuku watches with amusement as Ashido quickly sits up, pulling herself to her feet and raising her hands in surrender.

“I’m going, I’m going!” She says, smiling and shaking her head. Kirishima offers the dumbbell to her and she takes it with a nervous look on her face and starts doing bicep curls that make her arms shake the tiniest bit.

“Keep your elbow down,” Kacchan says, demonstrating with a bend of his arm. “It’s fucking cheating if you use your shoulder.”

“Fiiiiiiiiine,” Ashido sighs, fixing her form and continuing. Kacchan stands, watching her. Izuku can see the array of the various weights of dumbbells he’d picked out for all of them, lined up from lightest to heaviest.

“Did Bakugou do sports in middle school?” Uraraka asks, and Izuku looks up to see her standing behind him, screwing the lid back on her water bottle.

“I don’t think so,” Izuku replies, turning back to watch Kacchan snap and poke at Ashido until she got her form right and switched to the next arm. “He’s just always wanted to be a hero.”

“He’s so dedicated,” Uraraka says. “I’d thought that, y’know, with a quirk like his, he wouldn’t need to...”

Izuku hums. “I think a lot of people would think that,” he answers, leaning forward so his elbows rest on his knees. “But Kacchan’s never been satisfied with how he is now. He wants to be number one, so.”

“You think really highly of him, huh?” Izuku looks up at Uraraka, sees her smiling.

“Y-Yeah, I guess...” he replies, and she just nods, a knowing look on her face.

“I think that’s amazing in its own way, y’know? Especially given how mean he was to you at the start of the school year.” She tips her head to the side slightly, smiles wide at him.

Izuku laughs nervously. “Yeah...” *If only she knew*, he thinks. *I wonder what she’d think, if she knew*.

Chapter End Notes

cw: self harm

i hope you enjoyed!!!! im excited to write the sports festival, and i spent a TON of time planning it! just a heads up that there might not be an update tomorrow-- i have a lot of stuff to do for school and im meeting a friend for a lunch date, so i'll be gone part of the day that i would normally be able to write. im still going to try to get an update out but i thought i'd warn yall just in case!

recon

Chapter Summary

last time: izuku sneaks around and also joins the bakugou boot camp

Chapter Notes

hi guys!!! i ended up being able to update anyway :D im getting close to not being behind with classes anymore, and i had an awesome day today so im thinking i should be able to even fit in a one-shot some time this week in addition to this fic which makes me really happy!! as always, thank you for all of the nice comments; they mean a LOT to me!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“Why knives?” Aizawa asks, watches Izuku adjust his grip on the rubber training knives that Aizawa had given him.

Izuku shrugs, feeling heat on his face. “Um, I-I just think they’re easy t-to carry and c-conceal,” he answers, avoiding Aizawa’s gaze and praying that Aizawa isn’t making the connection between him and his vigilante self. When Aizawa had asked him what weapon he wanted to learn to use, Izuku had chosen knives before he’d even considered the fact that it might link him to his other identity.

“Hmm,” Aizawa grunts. “You’re not wrong, although the main issue with knives is that they’re easy to use against you if the enemy gets their hands on them.” He looks down at the rubber knife in his own hand, and Izuku watches as he flips it, catching it neatly by the handle. He looks at Izuku out of the sides of his eyes.

“That’s why I’ll train you to fight against someone with a knife as well,” Aizawa says, meeting his gaze.

Izuku nods. “R-Right,” he answers, holding the knives like he would hold his normal knife when he was on patrol. Aizawa watches him, and Izuku has to swallow down a burst of anxiety. *I’m not the only one who uses knives*, he reassures himself. *This won’t give me away*.

“Come at me,” Aizawa says, standing with his hands at his sides. He’s wearing his hero outfit minus the capture scarf and goggles, and Izuku nods, settling down into a fighting stance before dashing forward, using the techniques Aizawa had already shown him as he stabs forward with the knife.

Aizawa dodges out of the way, twisting his torso to the side of the knife. “Good,” he says, sounding surprised. “Have you used knives before?”

Izuku nods before he can help himself. “I-I watch a lot of v-videos,” he says, stepping back into a fighting stance. “S-Some of them have weapons, so I practice with chopsticks.” It’s not totally a lie,

but he hasn't used that method in a good while. Nowadays, he just goes out and fights with his knives until he survives the encounter.

Aizawa raises an eyebrow at him. "That's creative," he says, and his face is so blank that Izuku can't tell if he's making a joke or not. "What you're doing works fine if you're the only one with a knife, but if both you and the person you're fighting have knives, you want to go for the hands first." Aizawa holds his hand out, the knife gripped in it. "Even a completely untrained person can do damage with a knife. Going for the hands will keep you at a distance and will allow you to disarm your opponent. Even if they have more knives, they can't use them against you if their hands are badly damaged."

Izuku nods, taking a step back so that he's at more of a range he stands at when throwing a kick. "I should stay back, right?" Aizawa nods, moving into a fighting stance of his own.

"You'll actually want to put a little bit more distance between you and your opponent," he says, sliding back about another foot. "Even a short knife gives you a little bit more reach." Aizawa demonstrates by swiping the knife in the air, the motion easily brushing past Izuku's hands.

"Okay," Izuku says, nodding.

Aizawa tilts his head slightly. "How's your wrist?" Izuku follows his gaze to where the bruise, yellowing and nearly healed, is showing where his hoodie sleeve has fallen down.

"I-It's a lot better!" Izuku says, giving his teacher a smile.

"Good," Aizawa says, nodding. "We're both going to end up with a lot of bruises from this, so I need you to let me know if you need a break."

Izuku swallows and nods.

--

Izuku opens the door to the hardware store, pushing open the glass door and hearing the soft chime of the bell as he steps inside. The temperature inside is just the same as outside, cool and pleasant. He glances at the counter, where Miura is usually waiting, but she isn't there and the stool is empty. He looks around, listening, and sure enough, he hears the sounds of chatter from one of the aisles.

Miura steps out, carrying a toolbox still in its packaging. She spots Izuku immediately, her low pigtails shifting on her shoulders as she turns to greet him.

"Oh, Midoriya!" She smiles, tilting her head slightly. "I'll be right with you, I just need to get this rung up for her." She jerks her head back, gesturing as a familiar face steps out from behind the shelf. It's Avenging Angel, that new pro hero that Izuku had seen as Ace a few weeks ago. Her hair is in the same braid as before, and she's wearing what must be her hero outfit. She blinks, looking at Izuku, then smiles politely.

"Midoriya, was it?" She asks, putting one finger to her chin. In front of her, Miura walks over and sets the toolbox on the counter.

"U-Um, yes," Izuku replies, feeling a little heat rise in his cheeks.

"Have we met before?" She asks, tilting her head slightly. Izuku feels his stomach drop, and he barely catches the way Miura eyes him worriedly. "I'm getting déjà vu."

“I-I don’t think so, um...” He bites his lip. “Maybe your name would ring a bell?”

“Oh!” She nods. “I’m Ren Yamauchi. I work at a cafe a little ways north of here, maybe you’ve stopped by?”

Izuku shakes his head, thankful that she doesn’t seem to have made the connection between him and Ace. It’s odd, though, that she’s lying about her job. It’s not completely abnormal for underground heroes to hide their civilian identities, but Izuku has a hard time piecing together why she’s lying in this situation specifically. Behind the counter, Miura hums.

“I’ve got you all ready to go, Yamauchi,” Miura chirps, and Yamauchi starts, taking a few steps away from Izuku and towards the counter. Izuku lets out a breath he hadn’t realized he’d been holding, and he busies himself by pretending to look at a display of plumbing supplies, a mixture of copper, plastic and... lead pipes. Izuku frowns, rereading the label. He wonders why they sell those, given that lead is toxic.

“Thank you, Miura!” Yamauchi says, and Izuku turns to see her lifting the toolbox off of the counter. “I’ll be back,” she says, and Izuku watches the way Miura nods, a polite smile on her lips. Miura keeps her eyes glued to Yamauchi as she walks out, not looking away until the glass door shuts and the bell hanging at the top of it chimes.

Miura turns her gaze over to Izuku, her face looking serious under her glasses. “You were afraid of her,” she says, almost whispering, and Izuku feels a shiver go down his spine.

“N-No, I wasn’t!” He replies, shaking his head. “I just--”

“You recognized her.” Miura says, then sighs. “I won’t press. What can I help you with today?” She steps back out from behind the counter, her usual apron tied on top of a mustard yellow long sleeved shirt and a pair of dark jeans.

“Um,” Izuku bites at his lower lip, peeling off a thin piece of dead skin there. “Do you sell guns?” he asks, watching as Miura blinks, tilting her head to the side slightly.

“No,” she answers. “Just ammunition. I don’t have a license to sell firearms,” she says, watching him. “Are the knives not enough?”

Izuku shrugs, looking down at the floor, scuffed and worn as it is. “N-No, I just thought... I thought it’d be nice to have something else, a-as backup.” He’s not sure why, but Miura is acting differently, and he doesn’t like it. There’s something unpleasant about it, even though she hasn’t done anything rude or mean, and Izuku feels like he’s under a microscope, pinned under glass.

“Hm,” Miura hums, still looking at him through her glasses. Izuku swallows.

“I-I guess I’ll just go, then,” he says, laughing nervously as he puts a smile on his face. “Um. H- Have a good day?” He starts to move towards the door, but Miura reaches out, grabbing his wrist. Izuku can’t help but flinch, even though her grip is gentle. He follows her gaze down to his wrist, to the yellowing bruise still there. Her fingers, pale and thin, are studded with bruises of their own, between the knuckles of each finger. They’re black and violet--fresh--and they match the one on her wrist, a band of blackened skin. Izuku stares at it.

“Midoriya,” she says, and Izuku looks up to see a soft look on her face. “I don’t know what you needed the knives for, and I don’t know what you need the gun for, but... I think I have some idea.” Izuku watches her take a deep breath. “You don’t have to kill to defend yourself,” she says, staring at him with near-black eyes. “And you don’t want to. You’re going to be a hero, right?”

Izuku blinks, trying to remember when he'd told her that. "Yeah," he answers, voice just above a whisper.

"Good," she says, smiling gently. "Then you should know that heroes don't kill people unless there's no other choice. You should *also* know that you can't be a hero if you're dead."

Izuku blinks. "I-I wasn't going to--"

"Weren't you, though?" Miura lets go of his wrist. "There's only two reasons a high schooler wants to buy a gun when he already has knives and knows how to use them. Either he wants to kill himself, or somebody else." She tips her head slightly, her eyes drifting over his face. "For you, I would guess it's a little bit of both, but I've been wrong before."

Izuku swallows, takes a step back. Miura doesn't stop him, this time.

"Be careful, Midoriya," she says as he puts his hand on the door, tugging it open. The bell chimes, the sound ringing in the store. "Come back soon."

Izuku turns and almost runs out of the store, his heart pounding in his throat.

--

Izuku walks along the sidewalk, his and Kacchan's steps just barely out of sync as they walk side by side. Izuku's uncomfortably hot in his school blazer, but the shirt underneath is short sleeved, and the angry red cuts hiding underneath aren't something he wants Kacchan to know about, so he just tries his best to focus on the sensation of the light breeze and ignore the way the afternoon heat is making him sweat.

Kacchan seems to be in a similar state, even though he's already taken his blazer off, carrying it draped over one arm. He's always sweat more easily than Izuku. *Probably a side effect of his quirk*, Izuku thinks as he watches a bead of sweat run down Kacchan's neck, stopping and soaking into the already damp fabric of his shirt collar. Kacchan slides his gaze over, meeting Izuku's stare, and Izuku quickly looks away, his face heating up at having been caught staring.

"Oi, Deku," Kacchan says. "Do you have anything about me in any of your nerdy notebooks?" Izuku risks a glance at him, sees Kacchan's face calm and curious. He scowls slightly when Izuku makes eye contact with him.

"Um," Izuku swallows. "Why?" He looks back to the ground in front of him, watching as the squares of sidewalk pass underneath his feet. Kacchan has only ever mentioned his notebooks in the sense that he found them creepy, thought they were stupid and stalkerish. Izuku isn't sure he wants to hear how Kacchan will react to Izuku having analyses on him.

"I thought it'd be pretty damn convenient to have your nerd ass shit about my fighting style," Kacchan says, voice rising slightly. "It's fucking fine if you don't."

"I-I do," Izuku replies, twisting his fingers nervously around the straps of his backpack. "I, um. I thought you thought they were creepy, so I-I haven't shown you, but I have a lot of stuff about you."

"Yeah?" Kacchan says, and Izuku sees the way he smiles, his face almost devious. "That's fucking awesome," he says, chuckling low under his breath. "I'm going to fucking *destroy* all of those extras at the sports festival."

"R-Right," Izuku replies, shaking his head with a smile. "Most of them are in my notebooks at

home, though.”

“And?” Kacchan snorts. “Bring ‘em to school tomorrow.”

Izuku looks at him. “Y-You know I’m on book fifteen now, right...?” Kacchan blinks, then narrows his eyes.

“God, Deku, you’re such a fucking nerd,” he spits, kicking at the ground. “Whatever. You can bring one or two, I guess. Just pick your best ones.”

“You could come over this weekend,” Izuku whispers before he can think too hard about it. He doesn’t look up at Kacchan, keeping his gaze fixed on the ground, but he can still see Kacchan’s shock out of the corner of his eyes. “Mom would love to have you.”

“I haven’t been over since we were *six* , Deku,” Kacchan says, and Izuku folds his arms over his chest, hugging himself. “Your mom probably fucking hates me.”

Izuku shakes his head. “She d-doesn’t,” he answers.

“Why the hell not?” Kacchan snarls, and Izuku can hear his footsteps get louder as he starts stomping. “After all that shit I did to you?”

“She doesn’t know,” Izuku replies, curling his fingers around his arms, squeezing tight into the cuts under his uniform. He doesn’t look at Kacchan, and he doesn’t breathe.

“ *What ?!*” Kacchan hisses. “You didn’t fucking say anything?”

“No,” Izuku whispers. “I didn’t.”

“I treated you like the shit beneath my shoes for *ten fucking years* , and you didn’t tell your mom?” Kacchan sounds horrified, and Izuku glances over to see the absolutely *wrecked* look on his face. His nose is wrinkled and his brows are furrowed, like they would be if he was going to snarl in anger, but his lips are open and his eyes are full of something that Izuku doesn’t recognize. Izuku realizes they’ve stopped walking, and he takes a step back, staring wide-eyed at Kacchan.

“I didn’t want to worry her,” Izuku says. “And I didn’t want you to get in trouble.” It’s the truth, and maybe that’s why it hurts so bad when a *pained* look crosses Kacchan’s face.

“I told you to *kill* yourself,” Kacchan whispers, “and you didn’t want to get me in trouble?”

“Let’s not fight,” Izuku pleads, and he can feel himself tearing up. “I don’t--I don’t want to talk about that,” he says, swallowing around the lump in his throat, because how could he possibly explain to Kacchan? What could he tell him? Not just, *I thought about it* , not just *I considered it* , but *I did it, I killed myself the day you told me to* and *I kill myself at least once a week and sometimes it isn’t just because I have to* . How could Izuku do that to him?

Kacchan’s brows furrow even more, and Izuku can see the way there are tears in his eyes, too, and Izuku hates it. Kacchan lifts a hand, reaches like he’s going to touch Izuku’s face, but Izuku flinches back. He can’t help it; he’s buzzing with anxiety and some kind of deep, unstable upset that makes him want to bury his face in a pillow and scream. Kacchan jerks back, then drops his hand.

“Is it--” Kacchan swallows. “Is it really fucking okay for me to come over this weekend?” He looks confused, like he’s looking past Izuku and not at him.

“Y-Yeah,” Izuku says, rubbing his arm with one hand. “I’d like it, i-if you did.”

“Okay,” Kacchan says, sighing and looking Izuku over. “You okay, Deku?”

Izuku blinks, surprised, then nods. “Y-Yeah. Are you?”

Kacchan snorts, then starts walking again. “Don’t worry about me, shitty Deku. I’m fucking great.”

Izuku smiles at that and follows Kacchan, wiping his eyes on his sleeve.

--

It’s raining when Izuku sees the white haired villain again, the kind of rain that drowns out the normal sounds of the city and fills the air with a steady rhythm and coats the ground in a thin layer of standing water. Izuku’s already soaked through by the time he spots the villain, and he’s got his hoodie pulled up to cover his hair in the hopes that it’ll stop the dye from washing out in the rain.

The white haired villain doesn’t seem to be faring well, either. His white hair is plastered to his head, and he’s wearing a thin, clear plastic poncho over his suit. It looks kind of hilarious, honestly, and Izuku can see that he has another one wrapped over his usual duffel bag. He’s practically jogging through the city, his footsteps making little splashes each time he takes a step, and with all of the noise he’s making, it’s almost *too* easy for Izuku to follow him, so long as he’s willing to get wet. He’s just thankful that his boots are waterproof.

Izuku watches as the man stops outside of a boutique, a little store that’s long since closed for the night. Izuku can see pretty blue and yellow sundresses on the mannequins being displayed, and the awning that protects the entryway from the pouring rain is where the man stops. Izuku thinks, for a moment, that that’s the only reason the man has stopped, but just as Izuku scales the fire escape on the building next door, he sees a car pull up to the curb, a sleek, black thing with its brights on, setting the rain in front of it ablaze with yellow-white light. Izuku tries to catch a glimpse of who’s inside, but all he can see are heavily tinted windows. The front passenger door opens, and Izuku feels his mouth dry up with the first thing out of the door is a pair of metal rabbit ears, attached to a headband that disappears into sleek black hair. The woman from before steps out of the car, her back to Izuku. She’s wearing a heavy olive trench coat over the rest of her clothes, and she steps up onto the curb with those same metal platform boots, her feet well above the water on the ground.

“L-Leadfoot,” the man gasps, blinking. “I didn’t think you were the one who was meeting me here.”

Leadfoot, apparently, tips her head slightly to the side as she steps under the awning. “I would rather not be the one to deal with you, Mr. Clean,” she sighs, “but plans have changed. Fury wanted me to deliver your next mission to you personally.” Izuku watches as she reaches into her coat and pulls out a small, rectangular piece of plastic. *It’s a flash drive*, Izuku notes absently. Mr. Clean takes it with a shaking hand.

“Is it--” He shakes his head. “Am I on the diplomatic team?” He stares at the flash drive.

“Clean, putting you on the diplomatic team would be *asking* to get screwed over.” Leadfoot sighs, tipping her head back just enough for Izuku to see the top edge of her metal mask. “No, you’re doing recon on the other guys.”

He whips his head up, looking at her. “That’s practically suicide,” he spits. “And you know it.”

Leadfoot shrugs. “I wanted to do it myself,” she says, sounding bored, “but Fury needs me for the

diplomatic team, since Mouse is out of commission.” Clean crouches down, unzipping his duffel bag. Izuku can see black plastic inside, probably to protect the contents from the rain.

“What happened to Mousey?” He asks, not taking his eyes off of Leadfoot as he places the flash drive in some interior pocket.

“Fury happened to her,” Leadfoot says with a shrug. “She decided to get smart with him again.”

Clean hisses through his teeth. “Damn. She’s not going to last another week at this rate.”

Leadfoot hums in agreement. “Yeah, well, she wouldn’t be the first. Do you have the report?” She takes a step towards Clean, who flinches back. “Relax, soapy. If I had a hit order on you, you’d already be dead.”

Clean shakes his head, taking a shaky breath. “Yeah, I have the stupid report. You gonna put in a good word with Fury for me?”

“No,” Leadfoot says, not missing a beat. “If you did more than the bare minimum, I’d consider it.” She taps her foot against the sidewalk. “I’m waiting.” Clean reaches into his bag, shuffling the contents around for a moment before pulling out a flash drive that looks identical to the one he’d just received from her.

“I even got the stuff you wanted on that Avenging Angel character,” he says, and Izuku sees him grin as he holds the flash drive up to her. “That’s something more than the ‘bare minimum,’ yeah?” Leadfoot pauses, then takes the flash drive from him, placing it into her pocket and leaving her hands there with it.

“It is,” she answers, her voice softer. “If you survive your next mission, I’ll make sure you get what you want.”

Clean rolls his eyes. “Yeah, if I survive. What an amazing gift.”

“Don’t get snarky,” she snaps back, and Clean flinches. “We’re done here.” She turns her back to him, facing towards where Izuku is. Izuku freezes as she looks up, staring directly at where he’s perched on the fire escape. He feels his heart start to thud painfully in his chest, and he inches back along the fire escape, ready to jump down if he needs to. He doesn’t know her quirk, though, and that scares him. She could stop him, make his fall non-lethal, and then where would he be? Izuku is cornered, effectively, and he can’t make himself move, can’t make himself run as she makes eye contact with him.

“And be more careful,” she says. “You’re attracting too much attention.” Izuku waits for her to point him out, to hurt him, but she doesn’t. She turns and steps off of the curb, opening the door to the car and sliding inside without another word. Clean stares after her, a confused look on his face. Izuku draws in a deep breath, and hauls himself up to the roof, his fingers slipping just a little with the rain.

He waits until Clean is out of sight before he jumps. He’s not going to let her remember him, not this time.

--

It’s strange, *trying* to find Eraserhead. Izuku’s run into him plenty of times by accident, so he hadn’t really considered how he would find him when he meant to. He knows his general patrol route, but the issue is that Aizawa doesn’t always stick to the same route. If he’s running missions or if other heroes are on patrol, he’ll modify his route, avoiding areas that would already be

covered. Izuku's noticed he spends less time in the areas that Izuku patrols as Ace, and it makes him kind of proud of himself, in a strange way. Aizawa trusts him to keep that area under control, even if Izuku knows that it's mostly small-time criminals and drunk stupidity in his area, anyway.

For that reason, Izuku isn't on his normal route, right now. This part of the city is quieter, more industrial, and it reminds him of where he saw Leadfoot for the first time, but it thankfully isn't the same area. There's a bridge here that crosses over a shallow, muddy creek, and Izuku knows that Eraserhead sometimes patrols here after storms, like the heavy rain last night. Izuku doesn't know the exact reason, but it's probably because there are more accidents on the bridge when it's wet out and the accidents that *do* happen are worse.

Izuku would just text Eraserhead, except he isn't stupid enough to use his own phone to text a pro when he's technically a criminal. That, and Aizawa already has his number saved under his real name; they'd all given their homeroom teachers their numbers and gotten a few staff numbers after the USJ incident. A necessary precaution, but one that completely prevents Izuku from using the number Aizawa gave him.

So, Izuku walks along the side of the road that approaches the bridge. There are trees, here, little, recently-planted things. Izuku likes the way the wind ruffles their leaves, making a soft, whispery sound. It's not raining tonight, thankfully, and his mom had helped him dry all of his equipment yesterday morning so that it'd be ready for tonight, so he's warm and dry under his costume. The air still has a wet chill to it, the kind that promises more rain later, but Izuku is hopeful that he'll be home before it starts. Washable hair dye and rain really aren't the best combination, and he would prefer not to risk losing that element of his disguise in front of Eraserhead. Especially given that this is an encounter he *needs* Eraserhead to remember.

Izuku finds himself sighing quietly in relief when he spots Eraserhead on the sidewalk of the bridge, standing with his capture weapon still wrapped tightly around his neck and shoulders. It looks like it's early on in his patrol, judging by the way his hair is still only about as tangled as it was during class earlier that day, rather than the snarled mess that it has been the times Izuku encountered him later in the evening, pushing into the early morning. It's clear the exact moment Aizawa spots him; he tilts his head just the slightest bit and starts walking towards Izuku just as Izuku steps onto the portion of the sidewalk that marks the start of the bridge.

"Ace," Aizawa greets, stopping when they're about six feet apart. "Is everything alright?" He seems somewhat surprised to see Izuku here, which is fair; Izuku hasn't ever been out this way at night before.

"It's fine," Izuku says, sticking his hands in the pockets of his hoodie, mirroring the way Aizawa has his hands in his pockets. "I have some information I need to give you."

Aizawa grunts in acknowledgement. "Go on."

"The villain group working with Fury includes a male villain with white hair named Mr. Clean," Izuku starts, imagining his analysis page in his head. "His quirk allows him to make things slippery by touching them with his hands. He wears gloves normally, so it's like--" Izuku barely stops himself from comparing it to how Kacchan secretes nitroglycerin from his palms, catching himself just in time, "it's likely he can't turn the ability off and on at will. He uses the ability to infiltrate hero agencies, including the one that Transplant and Air Jet work at." Izuku takes a breath, and Aizawa raises a palm to stop him.

"Kid, how did you find this out?" Izuku can't place the tone in his voice.

"I followed Clean multiple times over the past three weeks," Izuku says, speaking quickly so

Aizawa won't have a chance to interrupt. "He's been meeting with a female villain going by the name Leadfoot. I don't know her quirk, but it's obvious from what she's said that she's higher up in the organization than Clean. She's spoken to Fury directly, and she seems to pick up reports and deliver missions for him. She wanted information on Avenging Angel, and Clean said he got it for her." Izuku swallows. "I don't know much else, but they have some kind of a diplomatic team that's working with other villains, I think. They're sending Clean to do reconnaissance on them, and Clean seemed really nervous about it."

"If this is your idea of not getting involved," Aizawa mutters, gritting his teeth.

"I never promised that I wouldn't," Izuku says, shrugging. "Was any of that helpful?"

"Was--" Aizawa cuts himself off, shaking his head. "Yeah, it's *helpful*. Were you spotted?"

"I..." Izuku pauses, swallows around the dryness in his mouth. "Not by Clean," he says, and Aizawa tenses up.

"Leadfoot saw you?" He sounds angry, like those first first days of classes. "Leadfoot saw you, and you got *away*?"

"She didn't chase me," Izuku says, blinking. Aizawa sounds almost scared, like he's worried for Izuku. It's strange, because Izuku thought he'd just be angry at him for getting caught, but there's something else in Aizawa's tone.

"Leadfoot has killed over two dozen officers and about half as many civilian witnesses since she started showing up around ten months ago," Aizawa says, voice low. "We've kept news of her from reaching the media because she kills every witness she can get her hands on. She's *dangerous*, Ace, extremely so." He pauses. "How do I know you're not working with her?"

Izuku blinks. "You don't," he answers, because he can't think of anything else to say. "But if I was, wouldn't I have claimed she didn't spot me at all? If she apparently kills everyone who sees her, it would be more suspicious for me to say she'd seen me in the first place when I could just say I didn't get caught at all."

"Hmm," Aizawa grunts. "For the record, I believe you. What you said lines up with what I already knew, but," he takes his hands out of his pockets and folds them over his chest. "You need to stop chasing after this group. I'm not kidding around when I say that they will not hesitate to kill you if they catch you."

Izuku can't help but chuckle at that. "I know," he says, and thinks, *I'm counting on it*.

Chapter End Notes

cw: nothing special for this chapter i don't think!

mmmmm these OCs.... when i tell y'all im invested in them, i mean it. i have been developing certain members of this group for ages and it feels so good to have izuku figure stuff out!

next chapter will be the sports festival part one!!! im SO EXCITED for that arc!! i also have a playlist that i listen to when i write this fic! some of the songs are just stuff i

like, and some have stuff to do with the fic itself! i add stuff to it every so often, too!
pls ignore the name on my youtube channel lol, i go by jude rn and the name on my
youtube is actually my deadname RIP

<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLO0K8J64otHa417jBWkVm42V7Ff-rBa0C>

sports festival, part 1

Chapter Summary

last time: izuku learns some interesting things about the villains plaguing the town as he and his friends prepare for the sports festival

Chapter Notes

hey guys!!! im really excited for this chapter so imma just :3c

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

On the morning of the sports festival, the air has finally cleared from the days of rain, leaving it a beautiful, bright morning. It's not hot or cold, but Izuku is both shivering and sweating in his sports uniform anyway as he stands with class 1-A, the clean morning sunlight illuminating the arena he stands in. The fine gravel under his feet--almost sand, really--crunches the tiniest bit as he shifts back and forth anxiously. He can tell he isn't the only one whose nerves are getting to them; beside him, Uraraka keeps swallowing, and Iida is clenching and unclenching his fists, over and over again. Izuku watches as Midnight takes the stage, a microphone in hand.

"Welcome, everyone, to UA's annual sports festival!" Midnight smiles, extending a hand to the audience and to the students lined up with their classes. Despite the supposedly limited audience, there's enough people to make a heavy roar of applause that makes a bead of sweat roll down Izuku's face as he bites at his lower lip. They've been preparing for this for so long, and it's so *important*. Izuku needs a good work-study and a good reputation his first year, if he wants to try and make it as the first legally quirkless hero. No agency will take him if his record isn't spotless, and he isn't so optimistic to think he'll get a work-study if he doesn't place at least in the top three.

He's not really listening as Midnight talks about the history of the event, announces the third years and the second years. It's probably rude of him, but Izuku focuses on his breathing instead, tapping his fingers against the outside of his thighs in time to his heartbeat. *I can't waste my energy being anxious*, he tells himself. *I need this adrenaline later, for the events.*

He's thought about it a lot, and he wants to get through the first two events with only two deaths max. His current limit appears to be around four or five deaths, and he doesn't want to be in anything but top shape for the tournament. He's also not sure when his quirk will reset him to when he does die; so far, it seems to put him out of danger, but there's no *real* danger to the sports festival. Any time Izuku has killed himself just for the sake of dying, he always resets to only moments before he did it, meaning that there's a chance he won't be able to use his quirk to redo the events at *all*. He'll certainly try, if it comes to that, but Izuku is intent on winning the first event *without* needing his quirk.

"Representing this year's first years, from class 1-A, we have Katsuki Bakugou," Midnight says, the mention of his class and Kacchan snapping him out of his thoughts. "Bakugou here placed first in the entrance exams, so he will be speaking on behalf of the first years. Bakugou, if you will."

Midnight gestures and Izuku watches Kacchan scowl, stomping his way up onto the stage. Izuku bites his lip, thinking of the speeches from the second and third years that he'd admittedly ignored. From the way the audience had cheered and the students had clapped along mildly, though, it was clear they'd said something positive and inspirational. As Kacchan grins, his face already taken with that sort of manic anger he wears in battle, Izuku doesn't think this will be the same kind of speech.

His fears are confirmed when Kacchan starts to snarl into the microphone, spitting something about how he's going to win. The funny thing is that after his first few words, Izuku can't even hear him over the muttering and the booing from the crowd. Izuku shifts nervously, looking at the faces of the other first-year classes, and he has to swallow around a lump in his throat when he sees the way they're all glaring at class 1-A like they had personally insulted them. Izuku supposes that they had, considering the way Kacchan is growling into the microphone. Midnight looks nervous where she stands on stage, and she nudges Kacchan aside, taking the microphone back from him.

"Well, that was..." She clears her throat. "That was certainly something. With that out of the way, I'd like to announce the first event for this year's first-year competition!" Izuku clenches his jaw as Midnight smiles, leaning forward to listen even though her voice is clear now, with the audience going quiet in anticipation. "The first event this year will be an obstacle course! We'll start soon, so all eleven first-year classes should make their way to the start as soon as I'm finished explaining.

"The course will take you a total of four kilometers around the outside of the festival stadium," Midnight says, gesturing at a large archway that's labeled as the starting point. "You may, of course, use your quirks as much as you'd like, but don't leave the course! Purposefully incapacitating another student is also banned. Now," she waves. "Go line up at the start!"

Izuku follows with the rest of his class as they make their way, walking quickly, toward the large corridor that marks the entrance to the obstacle course. It's closed off, blocking Izuku's view of whatever the course actually contains, but he's not surprised by it. The metal barrier is reminiscent of the UA barrier, and it's a strange kind of familiarity when Izuku looks up at it. He takes a deep breath, forcing his muscles to uncoil and his breathing to smooth out. *No matter what happens, this is just a festival*, he reminds himself. *It won't be as bad as USJ, because nobody will die. Well, except for maybe me*, he thinks with a small smile.

When the gate opens, he's taking off before he has a chance to think about it. He sees the robots right away, of course, and he recognizes them with a grin. *I know how to defeat them*, he thinks with glee, because he'd already dealt with them many, many times in the entrance exam. He's running, pushing past students like when he snuck out during the media infiltration, and the sensation of his feet slapping against pavement is a comforting one, something he's felt over and over again on his patrols. Without realizing it, Izuku's been preparing for this for a long, long time, and he grins as he pushes past a group of students just as a blanket of ice grows under their feet with a crackling sound. *Todoroki*, he notes, and he turns his head to see Todoroki, Kacchan, and Yaoyorozu running almost even with each other.

Izuku turns his gaze back to the front, eyeing the robots fast approaching. They're not moving particularly quick, instead walking around with slow, controlled motions, but Izuku doesn't slow as he approaches a two-pointer from the exams, crouching for just a second to prepare himself for a running leap at the thing. The ball of his foot hits it square on the forehead of its metal face with a satisfying clank, and it collapses underneath him. Izuku digs his heels into its shoulder, using the momentum of its fall to propel himself forward again. It's like he's on the obstacle course alone, really, because the only things he's focused on is running forward, dodging the bodies of falling robots and grinding his feet against the track. The muscles in his calves burn the kind of good pain that comes when he's on patrol, running through empty streets and across lonely rooftops, and the

clanging and shouts of the others fighting the robots is the only thing that reminds him he *isn't* on patrol. He keeps running, a grin stretched wide on his face as he passes the last robot, a zero pointer that he can already see crusting over with ice.

A piece of debris, a big flat piece of metal, starts to fly past him, and impulsively, he reaches out and grabs it, running with it tucked under one arm. It's heavy and awkward, but he remembers the entrance exam, when he'd needed a piece of metal to use as a lever to get Uraraka out from under the rubble that had trapped her. He prays that his effort here will pay off later, and if it doesn't, well, it's not like he can't try again.

He sees the next obstacle and barely even slows down. The ropes that connect the stone pillars, hanging high above the bottom of the track, are thin, but they're not wet, and they're not cold or slippery. Izuku stops running right at the edge of the fall, his shoes gritting against the ground as he skids to a stop. He shoves the piece of metal sheeting he's carrying into the waistband of his pants, and it's uncomfortable and awkward, but it leaves both of his arms free. Wrapping his hands around the rope and crawling across is easy, after so many nights climbing buildings and fire escapes in the pouring rain or without any light. The rope is soft and sturdy under his hands, and he notes idly that he has the added benefit of not being afraid of falling, not after so many swan dives off of roofs. *I guess I have Kacchan to thank for that one*, he thinks to himself as his childhood friend blasts past him, his explosions firing him easily across the gaps between the pillars.

Izuku forces himself to focus on putting one hand in front of the other as more people pass him, like a girl with pink hair and a jetpack, of all things. He knows that he's still ahead of most of the pack, at least, and he doesn't know what the last obstacle will be. He can still catch up, but that doesn't mean it isn't frustrating for him to be crawling upside-down along the ropes as others can literally *fly* across. It isn't fair, and it reminds him of what he's had to do, how many times he's had to die to get here. *But it doesn't matter*, Izuku thinks, *because I'm going to beat them anyway*.

Izuku hauls himself onto solid ground at the end of the pit obstacle, his hands just starting to ache from being tightly clenched around the rope. He stands up and takes a moment, chest rising and falling with each breath, to glance behind him as he pulls out his piece of metal and tucks it back under one arm. It hits him in a wave of relief, shaky and wonderful, when he sees that the pit trap is still absolutely crawling with other students. *I'm not behind*, he thinks, smiling and turning to run forward again. *I'm ahead!*

He sees the empty field up ahead, and for just a moment, he's confused. Then he sees the sign, bright and happy, that says "Warning! Mines!" in all caps. Up ahead, he can see Todoroki and Kacchan, neck and neck as they make their way across the minefield, awkwardly picking their way through the lumps of loose soil. It's making their progress slow, and Izuku steps forward, a plan already forming in his mind.

A couple of students walk past him as he starts to dig up the mines using that piece of metal as a shovel, but he ignores their incredulous glances. He sees one of the mines go off as a student misjudges a step, and the bright pink explosion gives him hope that this will work instead of just killing him and making him restart the whole race.

The mines are packed fairly densely, and the soil that covers them is loose and damp, probably from the rain that past week. Izuku's fingers become coated in a layer of damp earth, a crumbly, sandy brown substance that smells like pine trees and clean water. His stack of mines, still with earth clinging to each one, grows higher, and he decides that it's done when it starts taking him longer than he's comfortable with for him to find a mine he hasn't dug up yet. He takes the sheet of metal, holding it in front of him with both hands and takes a deep breath before slamming it down onto the mines, jumping on top of it as quickly as he can manage.

The force of the blast is nothing compared to the noise, and it reminds Izuku of that battle training exercise with Kacchan on the second day of school. His ears ring, and pink dust fills his vision as he soars forward, gripping to the front of his metal sled with all of his might.

It hits the ground with an impact that rattles Izuku's joints, but he doesn't stop, picking up the shield and running forward. He can see Kacchan and Todoroki both running still, with Todoroki looking back at him with gritted teeth. Izuku can't keep up with them, especially not as Todoroki starts to freeze the ground underneath himself, rendering him immune to the mines, and as Kacchan simply uses the blasts of his quirk to fly just above the ground, only stepping onto the earth every ten seconds or so. Izuku clenches his jaw, and still running, he moves his shield in front of him again, slapping it onto the mine he'd been about to step on with as much force as he can muster, harder than the first time.

It works, and Izuku hears a cascade of explosions from all around him as he loses his grip on the shield, flying through the air like he'd been shot out of a rocket. His hands flail uselessly beside him as he instinctively reaches out to try and catch himself on something but feels only air. It's kind of like jumping from a roof, except he doesn't know what's coming at the end.

When he hits the ground, he hears a loud cheer that he knows can only mean one thing, but he still doesn't believe it until he pushes himself up onto his knees, looking back to see the finish line a few feet behind him, just as he sees Todoroki leap across it with a dark look on his face and beads of sweat on his forehead, his hair damp and sticking to his skin. Izuku stares, still dazed as Kacchan barrels across the finish line, too.

Izuku stands up, then, staring out at the track, feeling other people brush by as they run across the line. It feels like more and more people run through every second, and he doesn't move until he feels a hand on his arm, tugging him.

"Deku, did you really finish first?" It's Uraraka, her face red from exertion and her mouth in a wide grin. "You're amazing! C'mon, let's go sit for the results. I think we're both moving to the next round for sure, though." She tugs on his arm, and he blinks, snapping out of his daze. His stomach feels like it's filled with something carbonated, and he smiles wide.

"I-I got first!" He chirps as Uraraka leads him to the area in front of the stage, with the results projecting onto the screen and names being added as more students finish. Uraraka giggles.

"You did! You got first place!" Uraraka squeezes him in a crushing, sweaty hug as they stop walking standing in front of the stage. "I knew we'd both get through." Her voice is warm and happy as she lets him go, still leaning slightly on his arm as Midnight walks onto the stage.

"Alright, everyone! I'm going to go ahead and deliver the results as well as some information on the next event, and then we'll have a short break." She clicks a button on a small remote in her hand, and the screen behind her shifts, showing only some of the places. Izuku sees his name at the top, next to the number 1, and his smile is so wide it stings his cheeks.

"The first forty-two students to finish the race will move on to round 2! The second round will be a cavalry battle, with the goal of obtaining headbands from other students to rack up the most points. Points will be assigned starting at five points for the forty-second place, increasing by five per place up until the second place." Midnight smiles. "The first place student will be the exception, and will be worth ten million points!" She clicks a button, and the point values appear by their names. Izuku sees his name, with 10 million points, just above Todoroki with 205. Izuku blinks, not processing it for a moment.

"Ten million?" Uraraka breathes next to him, her voice filled with awe and surprise. "Everyone is

going to target you...”

“I’ll explain more, including how teams will be selected, after a ten-minute break! Take this time to use the bathroom, rehydrate, and change into a new uniform if yours was damaged during the first portion. Anyone who needs first aid should go to the white and red tent located in the northwest corner of the stadium. I’ll see you in ten!” Midnight grins, flicking off the microphone, and Izuku swallows around the huge lump in his throat.

“I’m going to go use the restroom,” Izuku whispers, turning and walking away without waiting for Uraraka’s response. He isn’t even sure she hears him.

Izuku walks, legs stiff and steps uneven, towards the bathroom. He ignores the way he can still hear the murmur of his friends, can still make out the buzz of the audience. He listens to the drum of his heart in his ears, a steady beat that his thoughts match. *Ten million points. Ten million points. Ten million points.* Izuku tries to match his steps to his heartbeat, too, but it’s too fast.

He slips into the bathroom, the one for students competing in the competition. It smells like lemon-scented cleaner and antibacterial soap, and it’s silent except for the steady drip of water from one of the sink faucets. Izuku stops in front of that sink and turns the knob, shutting the water off the rest of the way, then looks in the mirror, at his face.

He’s pale and sweating, and there are little pink scuff marks on his cheek and shoulder, probably from the mines. He reaches a hand up to wipe his cheek off, but when he sees the way his fingers are shaking, hard, and he decides against it, instead dropping his hand to grip tight against the surface of the sink.

The thing is, Izuku could have made it through a cavalry battle, under normal circumstances. He could have formed a team with the right people, could have done his best and worked hard, and he probably would have been able to get to the third round. If he’d had a quirk, one that his friends knew about anyway, he could have scrounged up a team that would have sided with him and fought to win. If he hadn’t gotten first place, he would be able to get a team together despite his quirklessness, because he wouldn’t be the biggest target in the game. But now? With his ten million points and his quirklessness, he’s just a big, useless liability. It doesn’t *matter* that he got through the obstacle course without using a quirk. What matters is that for the cavalry battle, not having a quirk will make him vulnerable and *everyone* knows it. He messed up.

Izuku walks, slowly and calmly, to the last bathroom stall. He’s never done it this way in public, but he can’t get anywhere high enough, not now, and it’s not like he has any other way. He locks the stall door and sits on the floor, the tile cool under his skin. He listens, and he can still hear the faucet dripping. *It must be broken.*

Izuku reaches into the pocket of his pants and pulls out his little pill case, opens it and pulls out his razor. It shines in the bright fluorescent lighting, glimmering a light silver tone. The brand name is embossed on the side, and Izuku thinks it’s kind of funny that the last thing he reads before he dies, the last bit of language he experiences, is so often that brand name. He rolls up his sleeves, exposing the scars and scabs just above and below his elbow joint, from his cutting over the past few weeks. There isn’t a single scar from any of his suicides, but he still knows where to press the blade and how hard to pull, how to dig it in deep and press like he’s trying to cut between the two bones in his forearm. He does his right wrist first; he’d learned a while back he can bleed out more quickly, this way. The blood starts bubbling up almost immediately, and he switches hands, cutting down his left arm and dropping the razor to the floor with a sigh.

He leans back, rests the back of his head against the tiled wall behind him, and shuts his eyes. He can feel the pulse of his blood as it leaves through the burning wounds on his arms, but more than

that, he can feel that sensation of calm, clear relaxation that he always gets in these moments. It's nice, and Izuku feels at peace, even as he feels a rushing in his ears and the icy sensation of blood loss.

He's growing dizzy fast, his blood forming a puddle under him and soaking his pants, when he hears the door to the bathroom open. He's too far gone to flinch, really, but he does open one eye, watching with blurry vision as a pair of standard sports uniform shoes take a step inside, then freeze. *They must smell the blood*, Izuku thinks. *Or maybe I'm panting*. His breath does feel kind of shallow and quick, but that's normal for bleeding out. He's grown to kind of like it. It makes it seem faster, makes him fade into the blackness more quickly than if he tries to calm his breathing.

He hears the frantic beat of feet against tile, and he shuts his eyes again, just as whoever it is bangs on the door to his stall. Izuku takes the closest thing he can to a deep breath. He'd be worried about them saving him, but the only thing he can feel at the moment is a pleasant buzz in his chest, gathering around his ribs. He doesn't even know if his arms are still there. He wonders if he can move them, but he doesn't bother trying.

"Fuck," the person on the other side of the door says. His voice is familiar to Izuku, and maybe that's why Izuku isn't surprised to see the latch of the stall door ice over before it's broken by a neat hit with a hand. Todoroki pushes his way inside, mismatched eyes wide with fear, and Izuku can only think, *I don't remember opening my eyes again*.

"Midoriya?" Todoroki breathes, pausing for a moment before rushing forward, sliding to the ground. Izuku watches the way his knees land in the pool of blood, the way the dark liquid soaks into the legs of his sports uniform.

"Mm," Izuku hums in response, not resisting as Todoroki grabs one of his arms and starts pressing his hand onto the wound. It hurts, but Izuku doesn't really care because he can see the way his blood keeps pulsing out, the blood escaping between Todoroki's fingers. Todoroki is strong, but Izuku's heart is pumping his blood through the artery that he'd severed, and Todoroki can't possibly hold it all in.

"Why?" Todoroki says, a frantic whisper as he presses his palms into the wound, staring with wide eyes at Izuku's face. "Why would you--" he cuts himself off, shaking his head and looking back down at Izuku's arm.

"S okay," Izuku says, lifting the arm Todoroki isn't holding. A stream of blood falls from it, and Todoroki's face goes pale when Izuku reaches up to place his hand on his cheek. "I'll come back," Izuku whispers, the edges of his vision already going black. He can tell from the way his entire body is buzzing like it's asleep, from the way the bleeding in his arms has started to slow, that it's almost over. That he's beyond saving.

He can't hear what Todoroki says next as his eyes slip shut, but he sees the desperate look on his face, the beading of tears in mismatched eyes, and Izuku finds himself so, so grateful that others don't remember these pieces of time his quirk undoes.

Chapter End Notes

cw: more graphic than usual suicide

HEY I LOVE YALL. today slapped big time was very epic im so excited to write tomorrow's chapter!! and dw, we WILL get back to the villains! the sports festival just kind of cuts into the middle of that stuff time wise (but it's still plot relevant :D)

sports festival, part 2

Chapter Summary

last time: izuku got first place, then died! oh and someone saw him do it

Chapter Notes

apologies in advance i feel like this is hot garbage <3

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Izuku blinks awake in front of the barrier that blocks the obstacle course, and he's confused for a second, because wasn't he with Todoroki? The gate slides open, and people start to run, and he remembers all in a rush.

He stumbles through the first part of the race, copying his movements from before and slamming the robot to the ground, running without thinking. It's all a blur, fading into the background in his mind because he just can't get the image of Todoroki's face out of his head. His classmate's face, pale and horrified, his eyes so wide it looked like it hurt. Izuku's hand, pale from blood loss and his vision shaky, reaching up with blood on his skin. Todoroki, kneeling in dark, coagulating blood. Todoroki, asking him why, desperately trying to put pressure on his wounds.

Izuku's going slower than last time, but he can't bring himself to care. *It's not like getting first place will actually help me*, he thinks sullenly as he starts to crawl across the ropes again. He hadn't bothered to pick up the piece of metal sheeting this time; he won't need to beat Kacchan and Todoroki. Izuku doesn't even want to see Todoroki right now. Or maybe that's what he needs *badly*, he can't tell. He feels dizzy, still, like he's still bleeding out, and impulsively, he looks up to his arms. The fabric of his sports uniform is undamaged, clean and bright. It feels wrong.

He remembers the first day of class, Aizawa telling him that *just trying your best isn't enough*, and Izuku thinks that *they're giving me mixed messages here*! Because it's contradictory, that if he finishes first in this stupid race that he's branded as the target for the cavalry battle. It's contradictory, and Izuku wonders if the people who came up with the race even *considered* that. If they even knew that Aizawa had told him that. *It doesn't matter*, he thinks, *because they don't know I won in the first place. Nobody but me will ever know.*

Izuku hauls himself up after the slow climb across the ropes, and the minefield this time doesn't come with any bright ideas or any clever tricks. He walks as quickly as he dares, picking his way through the mines and weaving between the clumps in the soil. It helps that he's seen some of them before, that he doesn't hesitate, afraid. Some of the other students seem nervous, even as Present Mic's voice explains that the mines stun but don't seriously injure. Izuku practically throws himself across the field, a little more reckless than he maybe needs to be, but he can't help the way his chest aches with jealousy when the crowd starts cheering and he *knows* that Todoroki just crossed the finish line. Or maybe Kacchan; maybe Izuku's involvement is why Todoroki pulled ahead of Kacchan in the first place. It doesn't matter. Izuku runs, keeps a steady pace, until he

crosses the finish line himself. The victory feels dull.

He walks to the stage area, like he'd done with Uraraka the last time, except he doesn't wait. He looks up to the board, sees his name beside the small number fourteen written there, his name just under Tsuyu's. He stares at it, unblinking. Todoroki had gotten first, after all. Izuku thinks he probably deserves it, after what Izuku made him watch, whether he remembers or not.

"Deku!" Uraraka is breathless as she runs up to him, a happy smile on her face. "You beat me," she says, and Izuku is struck by the fact that there isn't any surprise on her face. Last time, there had been, he's sure of it. He'd thought she'd been surprised to see him succeed at all, and he hadn't even questioned it--it was natural for someone to be surprised at that. He hadn't thought it had been just because he'd gotten *first*, but at him doing well in *any* way. But she doesn't seem surprised or bothered that he's beat her, just happy for him, and that's what snaps through the haze hanging over him. He blinks, then smiles back at her.

"I-I think we're both moving on to the next round!" He says, giving her a bright grin to match her own, and she nods eagerly.

"Right! I dunno what they're doing for the second round, but there's no way we didn't make the cut," she answers, reaching up to tuck a lock of her hair behind her ear. "Looks like first and second place are from our class. Todoroki and Bakugou really are something, aren't they?"

Izuku nods, glancing to the side, where Kacchan is fuming. There's a wide circle of empty space between him and any of the other students waiting, probably because of the explosions sparking wildly off of his palms, even though his hands are down by his sides. He's looking up, his head tilted back to watch the leaderboard, and his expression is full of an anger that Izuku knew to expect, from years of watching Kacchan. It's close to the expression he'd had one time that Izuku beat him on a math final, but worse, and Izuku winces internally. *Todoroki is in for a rough time when Kacchan gets to him*, he thinks.

Izuku glances around, ignoring Midnight as she steps onto the stage and starts explaining. Her words are the exact same as last time, so Izuku doesn't feel bad tuning her out as his eyes settle on Todoroki. He's at the front of the pack, his uniform barely damaged except for a thin pink scuff near his left hip. Izuku wonders if he has trouble seeing out of his left eye; it doesn't *look* like the eye itself is damaged. Todoroki stares up at the leaderboard as it populates with the point totals of the forty-two students who passed, and he looks as calm and impassive as ever, even when his name lights up with the ten million points. Izuku's own name has 145 points next to it, and Izuku lets out a breath that he hadn't realized he was holding. *That's much more manageable*, he thinks. He tunes in as he recognizes the end of Midnight's speech.

"I'll explain more, including how teams will be selected, after a ten minute break! Take this time to use the bathroom, rehydrate, and change into a new uniform if yours was damaged during the first portion. Anyone who needs first aid should go to the white and red tent located in the northwest corner of the stadium. I'll see you in ten!" Midnight grins, flicking off the microphone, and Izuku takes a steadying breath. He looks over to Todoroki, and sure enough, the man walks off in the direction of the bathrooms. Izuku had been wondering if it was just a coincidence or if Todoroki had noticed him leaving and followed.

As Izuku is watching him, Todoroki glances back, his eyes meeting Izuku's. His face is calm, impassive, but Izuku thinks he sees his brows twitch for just a second, something akin to confusion. Todoroki blinks, then turns away, walking just the same as he had before. Izuku thinks he might have imagined it.

This time, Izuku doesn't haul himself off to the bathroom. He looks over to Uraraka, who's looking

right back at him, her head tilted to the side, slightly. From over her shoulder, he can see Iida and Tsuyu approaching, and Izuku waves at them. Uraraka blinks, turning to look, and then she waves too.

“Hey guys!” She says, and Izuku can hear the smile in her voice. “You made it through!”

“We all did,” Iida says, puffing out his chest a little bit. “All of Class 1-A is moving on to the cavalry battle.”

Tsuyu nods, lifting a finger to her mouth thoughtfully. “I wonder how the teams will be selected, ribbit.” She taps her finger once, twice on her skin. “They may decide to do it randomly.”

“I hope not,” Izuku says, swallowing. He doesn’t want to have to deal with the uncertainty of resetting, if that’s the case. There’s no telling what team he’d get put with, and the other teams would change, too, meaning that his strategies from before wouldn’t help. It’d be pretty much the worst case scenario.

“Why,” an unfamiliar voice says, sneering. “Because then you wouldn’t be able to stick with your precious *classmates* ?” They say the last word like it’s an insult, like a dirty word, and Izuku turns to see a blonde man with bright blue grey eyes, a nasty smirk on his face. He’s wearing a sports uniform, and he looks vaguely familiar.

“Who are you?” Uraraka asks before Izuku can get the chance, her face twisted in a confused frown.

“I’m not surprised you haven’t heard of me,” the boy says, rolling his eyes. “Class 1-A is too absorbed in their own lives to even *look* at the other classes, isn’t that right?” He shrugs, a confident smile on his face as his eyes narrow slightly. “My name is Neito Monoma, and I’m from class 1-B, you know, the *other* hero class.” He’s glaring daggers at them, and Izuku doesn’t have to look at Iida to know that their class president is bristling.

“Monoma,” Izuku says, giving him a pleasant smile. “It’s nice to meet you. I look forward to seeing your performance in the cavalry battle.” He gives Monoma the same face he gave to teachers in middle school, to potential bullies before they had decided whether or not they’d hit him. The impassive, empty smile, polite and non confrontational.

“Midoriya, is it?” Monoma narrows his eyes, his lips turning up in a strange smile that makes Izuku’s skin crawl. “You’re the quirkless one, hmm? I wonder why they let you into the hero course at all.” Izuku blinks, not surprised by the comment, but it still stings. He opens his mouth to reply, but he’s cut off by Tsuyu stepping in front of him.

“Monoma,” she croaks, her voice low and dark. “I think you should leave, ribbit.” Izuku glances over at her, and he sees Iida nod, agreeing with her. Monoma rolls his eyes, unbothered.

“What, do you like keeping him as a pet? I will admit, he looks like he’d be awfully fun to tease.” Monoma tilts his head, reaching a hand out toward Izuku. “I wonder--”

A large hand, the palm nearly the length of Monoma’s torso, suddenly wraps around him from behind, tugging him back before he can grab Izuku. Izuku blinks, looking at the orange-haired girl holding Monoma, looking irritated.

“Can you *please* behave for just ten minutes, Monoma?” She takes a breath, releasing Monoma at her side. “I left to get water, and when I come back, what do I find you doing? Terrorizing class 1-A?”

“Kendou, they *deserve* it,” Monoma replies, pouting but not making a move to walk towards Izuku. He folds his arms over his chest, a scowl on his face.

“They absolutely do not,” Kendou retorts, smacking him on the shoulder, then turning to look at Izuku and his friends. “I’m sorry for his *behavior* . He has *mental problems* .”

Monoma squawks, elbowing her. “I do *not!* ” Kendou shoves him back, looking unimpressed.

“C’mon, asshole, let’s go find the rest of our class,” she says, leading him away from the class 1-A group. Izuku stares after them, watches as they squabble and argue.

“Midoriya,” Tsuyu croaks, “Are you alright?”

Izuku blinks. “Huh? I-I’m fine!” He says turning back to look at her. His voice is a little shaky, but he feels fine, really.

“Jeez, that guy is so rude,” Uraraka says, crossing her arms over her chest. “He said all of that awful stuff about you, Deku.”

Izuku shrugs. “That really wasn’t that bad,” he says, not really seeing the problem. It’s not like it was untrue, either. It *was* a wonder why he was in the hero course. His friends aren’t keeping him as a *pet* , but that’s more due to their own kindness, rather than some special trait of Izuku’s. Being compared to an animal isn’t new to him, and calling him a pet, saying he’d be fun to tease, isn’t really anything that gets to him, not at this point in his life.

Uraraka frowns. “Well, it wasn’t okay for him to say that. He doesn’t even *know* you.” She sighs, dropping her arms to her sides, opening her mouth to say something else, but an announcement interrupts her.

“Hey listeners!” Present Mic’s voice booms through the stadium. “It’s time to explain the cavalry battle in more detail, so listen up!” Izuku and his friends turn back to the stage where Midnight had been. They hadn’t really moved, so they just have to look up to see the projector screen. It’s showing Present Mic’s face, a video clearly taken from the announcer’s stand.

“For the second part of the sports festival, it’ll be just as Midnight explained. You’ll be competing to get headbands from each other, with point values assigned according to your rank in the first round.” The screen changes, showing their points once again. “The headbands will be worn by the rider of the cavalry team. Teams may have between two and four members, with a maximum of one rider. Headbands may be worn on the head or neck, but must not be hidden. Quirk usage is allowed, but you may not intentionally injure another participant.

“You will be allowed to select your own teams! You have ten minutes to assemble your teams, and then we’ll be starting. The top four teams will move on to the next and final round. Happy selecting!” Present Mic whoops loudly, and the audience breaks into cheers while the crowd of students on the ground dissolves into chatter. Izuku turns to Uraraka, seeing her already looking at him.

“Deku, do you want to team up?” she asks, a smile on her face. “Me, you, Iida, and Tsuyu can--”

“Actually, Uraraka,” Iida interrupts, looking uncomfortable. “I would like to work with another group. I... As much as I value our friendship, it is also very much the case that in this endeavor, we are rivals.” Iida swallows, his jaw tensing.

“I have another team in mind for myself as well, ribbit.” Tsuyu looks apologetic.

“T-That’s okay!” Izuku cuts in, and Uraraka nods beside him. “Good luck, you two!”

Iida nods quickly, turning and marching away. Tsuyu dips her head, turning and walking over to Shouji where he and Mineta are talking. Izuku wonders if, in the permanent timeline, she and Mineta had still been in the flood zone together. He’d never asked.

“Who should we team up with, Deku?” Uraraka tugs on his arm, refocusing him. Izuku hums in reply, thinking as he looks out over the field. Most people are already organizing into teams, but... As Izuku scans the field, he spots Todoroki, standing in the center of the field, alone. He’s looking out at the others, looking almost uncertain. *He doesn’t have any close friends*, Izuku realizes. *And nobody wants to become a target because of the ten million points*. Izuku knows how that feels, and as Todoroki’s gaze meets his own, Izuku smiles.

“I have an idea,” he says, walking toward Todoroki. Uraraka follows him, and Izuku watches Todoroki blink as they approach.

“Midoriya,” Todoroki says, voice flat.

“Todoroki,” Izuku responds. “Let’s team up.” He holds out a hand to Todoroki, and Todoroki *flinches*, just the tiniest bit, but Izuku sees it. It’s a small motion, just the tensing of Todoroki’s shoulders and the gritting of his teeth, the smallest flash of panic in his eyes, but Izuku catches it. He’s used to reading people from his years of trying to judge who would make fun of him in class but leave him alone after and who would corner him and try to break his ribs.

“Todoroki?” Izuku asks, lowers his voice. Todoroki blinks, shaking his head slightly.

“Yes, we... we can team up.” He says, glancing from Izuku to Uraraka and back to Izuku. “It’s just the two of you?”

Izuku nods. “We should try to find a fourth, considering your point count.” He gestures to the leaderboard. “It’ll make things easier.”

“Ohoh,” Izuku startles at an unfamiliar female voice. “I think I can help make things *easier*.” Izuku turns to see the pink haired girl who’d soared across the pit trap in the obstacle course, a muscular girl with eyes that look like the crosshairs of a gun.

“Who are you?” Todoroki asks, voice short.

“I’m Mei Hatsume, future CEO of Hatsume Industries!” She says brightly, a smile splitting her face. “And with my babies, you three will be a shoe-in for the tournament!” She slaps the large bag she’s carrying, and something inside rustles with a metallic sound.

“Your... babies?” Uraraka’s brows are furrowed in a mixture of confusion and concern.

“Yup!” Hatsume reaches into the bag, rooting around in it for a moment before pulling out what appears to be a pair of matching bracelets. “I’m in the support course, see. These will help you, I think. They’re anti-nausea bands!” She passes Uraraka the bands, and Uraraka takes them, staring at them with open curiosity.

“Are those allowed?” Todoroki asks, tilting his head as Uraraka clasps them onto her wrists, just above the hem of her sleeves.

“Oh, yeah!” Hatsume turns to him, grinning. “Support course students can use what they want, you know. It’s how we get to show off all of our babies!” She reaches back into her bag, pulling out something that resembles the jetpack she’d used in the first round, and she holds it out to Todoroki.

“This isn’t really suited to you in particular, but it should be useful since you’ll be our rider, right?” She passes it to him, and he takes it from her.

“I didn’t realize we’d agreed on that,” Todoroki says, sliding the straps of the jetpack over his shoulders. “How does this work?”

“Just pull the handle on your left!” Hatsume answers, beaming. “With your quirk, maneuvering midair shouldn’t be too hard.” Todoroki nods, but Hatsume seems done paying attention to him, anyway. She turns back to the bag and tugs on something inside, pulling out what looks almost like armor. She offers it to Izuku, a pair of strange gloves that end at the first knuckle and extend to guard the bones of his forearms.

“These are just some neat little babies I whipped up the other day,” she says, grinning. “I’m sure you can figure out the basic idea, but these are also blast proof, which should help with that guy.” She jerks a thumb behind her, and sure enough, when Izuku looks over her shoulder, he can see Kacchan arguing with Sero and Kirishima.

“T-Thanks,” Izuku replies, putting them on. They fit well, and they feel just the right amount of heavy. He looks down at them, flexing and unflexing his hands. *These would be nice as Ace*, he thinks. The way they guard his forearms, he could probably get away with blocking weapons or quirked attacks with them. He’ll have to come up with some reason for Hatsume to give him a pair.

“Listeners!” Present Mic’s voice calls out over the field. “Return to the staging area to get your headbands and record your official team placements. Selection time is up!”

Izuku trails behind his group as they cross the field, walking the short distance to where Midnight, Vlad King, Ectoplasm, and a few other teachers are taking down teams and handing out headbands. He probably should be paying attention to the conversation, but instead, he’s eyeing the competition. Kacchan, Kirishima, Sero, and Ashido have formed one group, but that isn’t surprising. The group formed by Shouji, Tsuyu, and Mineta isn’t, either, if only because Izuku watched that team form in the first place. It strikes Izuku as strange, though, to see Iida standing with Aoyama, Ojiro, and a kid he doesn’t recognize, with wild violet hair that stands over his head in a cloud of thin strands. It’s even stranger, considering the blank, impassive look on Iida’s face, and Izuku gets the uncomfortable sense that he’s missing something.

Izuku follows behind Todoroki as they head over to their starting spot. Todoroki has the headband tied around his forehead already, his mismatched hair falling over it slightly. Izuku sees him tip his head back slightly, looking at Izuku.

“Midoriya,” he says, quietly enough that Izuku doesn’t think anyone but him can hear. “After this, we need to talk.” Izuku blinks, scanning Todoroki’s face, but he doesn’t see anything that gives away what this means. There’s no anger, no disdain or disgust on his face, but then again, Izuku didn’t exactly expect Todoroki to be a bully, anyway. What Izuku’s more afraid of (confusion, fear, pity, *recognition*) isn’t there, either, and Izuku wonders why Todoroki is so good at hiding his emotions.

“Sure,” Izuku replies, giving Todoroki a small smile, and Todoroki blink at him slowly, before turning to walk forward again. Izuku doesn’t have much time to think about it, though, because soon they’re at their starting point, and he’s having to coordinate forming the horse with Hatsume and Uraraka. It’s not as difficult as he’d expected, really, and he ends up as the front member of the “horse” group, mostly because Hatsume and Uraraka are closer to each other in height, so it works out better with Todoroki sitting on their shoulders, anyway.

“Start!” Present Mic’s shout is drowned out by the flurry of movement that’s set off by the sound, and Izuku is running forward with his team as the field explodes into motion.

Izuku sees a lash of green vines whip out in front of them, twisting up at Todoroki in an instant, and Izuku reacts without thinking, reaching up and snatching the vine from midair, ripping at them. The vines he’d pulled at tug at his palm, but the gloves that Hatsume had given him protect him from the thorns, and he silently thanks her.

“Todoroki, careful!” Izuku hisses. “They’re after us,” he shouts, pointing as a girl--Shiozaki, he thinks--with hair that matches the vine he’d just deflected tilts her head forward, a wave of thick vines rushing forward at them.

Todoroki waves a hand, a wave of ice cascading over the vines and freezing them in place. He nods, and Izuku grins, looking forward again. The group of class 1-B students seem to be distracted, fighting with Kacchan’s team, and Izuku turns his gaze to a team fast approaching them.

Yaoyorozu sits on top of Kaminari and Jirou’s shoulders, with Tokoyami forming the front of the horse, Dark Shadow already reaching towards them. Izuku bites his lip as Todoroki waves, another wave of ice rising up to meet their opponents. Izuku watches as the ice beats Dark Shadow back, but something about Tokoyami’s quirk looks... odd. Izuku frowns, seeing Dark Shadow seem to twitch and grow in the shadow of Todoroki’s ice, bursting through it just as Izuku hears a shout from Uraraka.

“Deku!” Uraraka shouts, and Izuku ducks just in time to dodge a piece of tape that flies past him. Izuku is forced to turn away from where Todoroki is trying to stave off Tokoyami and the rest of Team Yaoyorozu.

It’s years of practice that tell Izuku exactly how to dodge when Kacchan points a hand behind himself, angled down, then blasts the air between his teammates. Izuku hisses, raising his forearms to block Kacchan as he slams into him, a wild grin on Kacchan’s lips.

“Hey there, Deku,” Kacchan laughs, and Izuku pushes him off, gritting his teeth as Kacchan blasts his way through the air to land back on his horse, without touching the ground once. *It’s not technically against the rules*, Izuku thinks, *but that doesn’t mean I like it*.

“What was that?” Todoroki asks from above him, whipping out a wall of ice as a metal rod, sparking with electricity, comes from the other team fighting them.

“Kacchan is trying to rip it off of your head in midair,” Izuku hisses, watches Kacchan position himself to try again. “He’s coming!”

Todoroki nods, whipping around, hair raising up and moving as he quickly summons a wall of ice that blocks Kacchan’s path before the other boy can even take off. Izuku hears Kacchan curse loudly, and for some reason, the light of the explosions behind the ice barrier is what makes it click.

“Light,” Izuku breathes. “Todoroki, Tokoyami’s weakness is light. You need to use your fire; it’ll weaken his quirk long enough for us to get away from one of the other teams!” Izuku grins, shooting a glance up to Todoroki, only to see a look of grim determination on his classmate’s face.

“I don’t use my fire in combat,” he says, just as Izuku sees a thick sheet of something grey whip out from Yaoyorozu where she sits on top of her horse. Izuku feels the blood drain out of his face, and he opens his mouth to warn Todoroki, but he doesn’t have any time.

“Now, Kaminari!” Yaoyorozu shouts just as the insulation sheet wraps around her, Jirou, and Tokoyami. Izuku sees both Kaminari’s grin and the quick movement from Uraraka as she reaches up and slaps Todoroki’s back. The weight Izuku is helping to support disappears at the exact same time that he’s met with a shock that rattles his bones and makes his eyes clench shut involuntarily.

This isn’t his full power, Izuku notes, dully, as he feels his teeth smash against each other as the shock passes through his body. He’s seen people get hit by Kaminari’s full strength shock; they drop to the ground. From the way his muscles burn as the electricity leaves him, Izuku doesn’t really want to experience Kaminari’s full strength blast.

He blinks, trying to move his head to reassess their surroundings, but the muscles there don’t really listen to him. His head twitches back in a jerky motion, just in time to see Todoroki floating above them, looking disoriented. His face is set in a grim line, and he’s reaching for Izuku’s shoulder when Izuku hears it. He hadn’t realized his ears were ringing, but the sound of an explosion cuts right through it, and Izuku feels dread pool in his stomach.

Kacchan, flying across the air, collides with Todoroki midair, his hand sparking slightly as it grips the headband on Todoroki’s forehead. Izuku can see the grimace spread over his teammate’s face, the opposite to Kacchan’s toothy grin, but Izuku can’t do anything but watch helplessly. He orders his arms to move, and they twitch uselessly at his side for just a moment before he can reach up, snagging Todoroki’s leg just as he starts to go flying. Izuku grits his teeth, pulling him back down, and Izuku can see a burst of red where Kacchan must have hit him when they collided.

“Shit,” Todoroki swears, and Izuku almost laughs because *shit*, this sucked. Izuku turns, the tiny sparks of electricity finally loosening their grip on him as he sees Team Yaoyorozu and Team Bakugou fighting, ignoring Izuku and his team now. He supposes that makes sense.

“Time’s up!” A cheery voice calls, and Izuku freezes because, *what?* They hadn’t been on the field long at all. *We must have lost time when we were electrocuted*, Izuku thinks, his head spinning. He can feel Todoroki climbing down, and hear the way Uraraka growls in frustration, hears her kick at the ground as soon as she’s free from their formation. Izuku just stares, stares up at the leaderboard, even though he knows they can’t possibly be up there, not without *any* points. His head is spinning.

“Alright, listeners!” Present Mic’s voice is bright, happy, and it gets on Izuku’s nerves. “As you can see, the four teams that will be advancing onto the next round are Team Yaoyorozu in first place, Team Bakugou in second, Team Shinsou in third, and Team Kendou in fourth!” Izuku blinks, long and slow. *Iida made it*, he thinks, *but he isn’t reacting*. In fact, Iida is standing, still and calm, beside Aoyama and Ojiro, not moving an inch. Shinsou is the one one moving from that team, and he doesn’t look surprised or happy, really. There’s a small twist to his lips that could be a small smile, but it’s near impossible to tell. He sighs, dropping his shoulders, and Izuku can *see* the way realization and awareness bleed back into Iida, Aoyama, and Ojiro, all three of them blinking in shock. Aoyama drops to his knees, and Ojiro presses a hand to his head.

“I’m sorry, guys,” Izuku turns back to see Uraraka with a sad expression on her face. “I couldn’t be of much use.”

“It’s okay,” Izuku says, giving her a calm smile. “You did the best you could.”

“Yeah,” She says, looking at the ground. “I, um. I’m going to go call my parents,” she whispers, her voice breaking. “I’ll see you all later?”

“I’m going to go back to my workshop,” Hatsume says, not sounding upset in the slightest. “I have tons of new ideas! Thanks for the help!” She waves and bounces off, not looking back. Uraraka sniffles.

“It’s okay, Uraraka,” Izuku says, because someone needs to. “I’ll see you in the stands.” She nods, turning and wiping at her eyes. Izuku takes a deep breath, then starts to walk as well. Uraraka won’t have to call her parents. She won’t have to cry about this, not next time. Izuku already knows what he needs to do as he steps forward.

“Midoriya,” Todoroki says, and Izuku blinks, turning to look at him and seeing his brows furrowed. The faint red mark on his jaw is already starting to bruise, turning a light purple shade.

“Yeah?” Izuku replies, stopping and tipping his head.

“What are you...” Todoroki shakes his head, blinks. “Where are you going?”

Izuku smiles, shrugs. “I’m just going to use the restroom. I want to wash the sweat off of my face.” He watches Todoroki’s face, reminds himself that *Todoroki doesn’t remember. I’m the only one who knows*, but he’s not entirely successful at convincing himself.

“Hm,” Todoroki grunts, turning his gaze back away from Izuku, and Izuku takes it as a dismissal. He pivots on his feet and starts walking back to the restroom, forcing a calm look onto his face. The walk to the bathroom feels longer than it really is, but it’s probably because Izuku keeps listening for the sounds of people following him, just in case.

He makes it to the bathroom uninterrupted, though, and when he locks himself in the last stall, he doesn’t waste time. He rolls up his sleeves and pulls out his razor. He sits on the tile floor. He draws two matching lines on each forearm, two wide cuts that spill out dark blood in pulses that match his heartbeat. He drops the razor, leans his head back, and counts back from one hundred.

He makes it down to sixty-two before he hears the door to the bathroom open, just like last time, except whoever it is doesn’t hesitate. Izuku hears footsteps, and he starts to try and haul himself up, his feet slipping in the blood uselessly. His head is spinning already, and he’d cut deeper this time, his arms not responding to his commands at all. His shoes slide in the dark liquid just as the stall door is ripped open, and Izuku looks up to see Todoroki, a white icy mist coming from his mouth and a wild look on his face.

“Midoriya!” He shouts, flinging himself forward, and this time, Izuku throws himself back, moving away from Todoroki. He slides, only managing to corner himself in the back of the handicapped stall he’s killing himself in, but his motion seems to stop Todoroki short for a second.

“Why--What--” Todoroki shakes his head, raising a hand up to his forehead. “I don’t *understand*,” he hisses. “I don’t know what’s happening. I don’t *remember*.”

Izuku draws in a sharp breath, fighting against the grey in his vision. “Y-You don’t remember,” he says, his voice high and weak. “Remember *what*?” he manages to ask, his vision filling with grey. He can see Todoroki’s gaze snap back over to him.

“I don’t--” Todoroki’s voice fades into blackness, and Izuku tries for the first time ever to resist the heavy grip of death.

Chapter End Notes

no specific content warnings this chapter! i hope that this was enjoyable! my brain will Not cooperate so idk if this is actually a shit chapter or if im just dissociating LMAO.

oh!! im considering having a discord server for this fic, since there's been a lot of discussion in the comments n stuff!! let me know if you'd be interested, and if there's enough of an interest i'll have it ready by update tomorrow :D thank you all for supporting me, it means SO MUCH!

sports festival, part 3

Chapter Summary

last time: izuku make it through the obstacle course and lost in the cavalry battle. he's experiencing something... odd, with his quirk.

Chapter Notes

HEY GUYS!!! im very excited for this chapter :D ill get to all of the comments soon too, maybe tonight!! i've made a discord server for this fic too, which i'll post the link to in the end notes! i hope you enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Izuku opens his eyes, his chest heaving. He's on the field, staring up at the stage, and for a terrible moment, he thinks it's after the cavalry battle, after they *lost*, but when he blinks up at the stage, it's showing a countdown from ten minutes and the words "Short Break!" in bright lettering. Izuku sighs a breath of relief before what just happened hits him.

Izuku whips his head around, looking over the field to find Todoroki already watching him, face impassive, frustratingly so. Izuku stares back at him, and he's sure he looks stupid, wide eyed and odd, but Todoroki just narrows his eyes. Izuku makes a quick decision, then, turning and walking towards the bathroom with determination in each step. He doesn't need to turn and check to know that Todoroki is following him. He can hear his footsteps, fast to catch up with Izuku, but Izuku doesn't look back.

The way Izuku sees it, there are a few possibilities here. The first and arguably the worst is that Todoroki remembers everything--that he remembers Izuku, sitting in a pool of his own blood, reaching up and telling him it'd be okay, that he remembers Izuku, dodging his attempts to help while Todoroki struggled to remember. Izuku doesn't think it's likely, though, because he'd seemed awfully confused, and also because Izuku doesn't get why Todoroki would remember, of all people. *What was different? Was it my blood? The physical contact? The fact that I told him I'd be back?*

Izuku pushes open the door to the restroom, stopping in front of the sinks and turning to face the door as Todoroki steps inside. Todoroki meets his eyes immediately, then winces, bringing a hand up to rest on the side of his head, squeezing his eyes shut for just a second before he looks back at Izuku. The broken faucet drips quietly in the background as Izuku tilts his head to the side and furrows his brows slightly, painting the perfect picture of confused concern.

"Todoroki? Are you alright?" Izuku watches, tries to see if Todoroki is showing signs of *knowing*, of *remembering*. Todoroki blinkys rapidly, then shakes his head, dropping his hand back to his side.

"I'm fine," he says, his eyes tracing the bathroom, looking around. They're alone, of course, and Izuku takes it as a good sign that Todoroki hasn't looked at his arms or spent any time staring at

the last stall in particular.

“Ten million points, huh?” Izuku says, giving Todoroki a small smile. “It’s gonna be tough for you in the next round.” Todoroki’s gaze snaps back to Izuku’s face.

“Midoriya,” he says, face serious. “Have we... met somewhere before?”

Izuku tips his head to the side. “Before...?” He wonders, maybe, if all Todoroki has is a vague sense or a faint image. It’d make sense, given how he still seemed surprised when he barged in on Izuku killing himself for the second time. Izuku can only hope that Todoroki doesn’t remember details.

“Before UA,” Todoroki clarifies, clenching and unclenching his jaw. “I feel like... I feel like I’ve seen you before. Injured.”

Izuku blinks, frowns. “I was injured at USJ, remember? I don’t think I’ve been hurt around you other than that...” He watches Todoroki nod slightly, his face still deep in thought.

“I... Nevermind,” Todoroki shakes his head. “It doesn’t matter. I must have had an odd dream, or something.” He walks past Izuku, to the sink, and turns on the tap.

Izuku watches him splash water onto his face, the water clinging to his skin, and Izuku steps over to the paper towel dispenser and pulls one out, turning back to offer it to Todoroki. Todoroki blinks at him in surprise, the water already turning to steam and evaporating off of his face.

“Oh.” Izuku blinks, then giggles. “Sorry, I’d just assumed...”

Todoroki shakes his head. “It was... It was nice of you.” He stares at Izuku once more, and this time, Izuku sees him look up and down Izuku’s body, like he’s scanning for injuries. The scrutiny feels odd, uncomfortable, and Izuku shifts his weight between his feet.

“I’m going to go back out to the field,” Izuku says, stepping towards the door and hoping Todoroki doesn’t pick up on the fact that Izuku hasn’t actually done anything in the bathroom other than talk to him. Todoroki doesn’t reply as Izuku pushes the door, walking out onto the field just in time for Present Mic to start announcing the terms of the cavalry team selection.

Izuku weighs his options as he crosses the field, timing his breaths to his steps, one inhale for every three steps, one exhale for the next three. It keeps his mind steady, even with the anxiety that’s bubbling up in him at the thought of facing the cavalry battle again, knowing that he loses if he teams up with Todoroki and Uraraka and Hatsume.

He also doesn’t want to push it, doesn’t want Todoroki to remember more if repeating the events of the last round somehow triggers him to recall more. It’s going to be difficult, trying to figure out why Todoroki remembers *anything* without making the other boy suspicious, but it’s really a problem for after the sports festival, when Izuku isn’t trying to win. He thinks back to his first attempt and winces.

I can’t repeat that, he thinks, so I need a different team. But who else would team up with me? Of my friends, I already know Iida and Tsuyu are with other teams. Izuku scans the field, looks over the groups of students. Most of them are familiar to him by now, but his gaze catches on the purple haired kid, the one who’d... done something, to Iida. Izuku wonders, idly, if it’s a mind control quirk or if he’s reading into it too much.

He remembers his name, from the last round, too. When Present Mic tells them to start picking their teams, Shinsou moves over to the side, talking to Ojiro with his back to Izuku. Izuku can see

the exact second that Ojiro's eyes go blank, all of the color draining from his irises and his face falling slack, calm and empty. Izuku watches Shinsou sigh, reaching up to rub his hand on the short fuzzy hair at the nape of his neck. Izuku approaches, walking up to him quickly.

"Shinsou," Izuku says, and Shinsou freezes, turning slowly to look at Izuku. His eyes are widened slightly, a lazy frown on his face. "Do you want to team up?"

Shinsou blinks, opens his mouth, but Izuku presses on. "I already know about your quirk," Izuku says. "I think it's incredibly well suited to the cavalry battle, and I want to work together." Izuku squeezes his hands into fists where they rest by his sides, because this is the test. If Shinsou brainwashes him, Izuku might very well lose his chance to make an impact during the second round, turned into a mindless puppet instead. Izuku doesn't know his activation condition, but it could be something as simple as eye contact.

"You know about my quirk, and you want to team up with me anyway?" Shinsou asks, eyes narrowing. Izuku can feel that he's waiting to see if Izuku trusts him, if Izuku will take that kind of a risk.

"I do," Izuku says, voice firm. "I think it's an amazing quirk," he adds, because he knows it's what Shinsou needs to hear, even though it hurts somewhere in Izuku's heart to be manipulative like this. Izuku may have been raised quirkless, but that doesn't mean he's unaware of what those with psychological manipulation quirks face. The way they'd be told they were dirty, broken, tainted, *evil*. Izuku had spent long nights on forums, talking to other outcasts like him, and he'd spoken once with a girl whose quirk let her make other people like her more, if she touched them. She'd been afraid, always, that nobody really liked her, that it was all her quirk, and from what she'd said, the other people in her life were afraid of that, too. She wasn't given a chance to make friends, to talk to people, banned from touching others at school and constantly questioned at home. Izuku doesn't know the details of Shinsou's quirk or his life, but he can guess.

Shinsou blinks, tilting his head to the side slightly. "What's in it for me?" He asks, looking Izuku over. "You're quirkless, aren't you." It's not a question; it's an insult, and Izuku knows it. He doesn't let it rankle him. There are far meaner things to say than the simple truth.

"I am," he replies, shrugging. "And I know all of class 1-A in and out. Not only that, but I'm smart."

Shinsou snorts. "Yeah, so am I." He rolls his eyes as he says it.

"Two heads are better than one," Izuku says, easily. "Sure, you could win just by using your quirk. But wouldn't using your quirk to control your teammates as well just make your reputation worse?" He watches as Shinsou scowls, lips tugging down and nose twitching slightly.

"What do you think you know about my reputation?" He says, voice low and ugly. "I don't need your help."

"You don't," Izuku agrees, making a big show of folding his arms over his chest slowly, looking at Shinsou and smiling. "But won't it be better this way?"

Shinsou stares at him for a long moment before answering. "Fine. But if you get in my way, I'll brainwash you." He glances at Ojiro, who's standing there blankly, not moving except to breathe, staring blankly at the air in front of them.

"Is that what your quirk does?" Izuku watches the way Ojiro doesn't move. "Brainwashing?"

“I thought you said you knew what it did already,” Shinsou grumbles, narrowing his eyes at Izuku.

“I saw you put some sort of control effect over Ojiro, but I don’t know the details,” Izuku answers, stepping forward to wave a hand in front of Ojiro’s face. “Can he hear us?”

Shinsou shrugs. “Probably. How much they remember afterwards really depends on the person. Physical impact or pain can break them out of it, though, so we’ll need to be cautious during the battle.” He looks down, picking at his nails. “I also want a fourth member to my team, so if you have any suggestions, I can go and brainwash them.”

Izuku tips his head. Last time, it had been Iida and Aoyama, but... “Why don’t you just ask them to join up with you?” Shinsou raises an eyebrow.

“Why don’t I ask the hero course students to team up with a general studies kid that they don’t know with a villain’s quirk,” he says, deadpan. “Why don’t I do that. Wow, I’ve never considered the notion. I’m sure it would turn out great.”

Izuku shrugs. “Ojiro would probably work with you, if I asked him to. He’s a good guy.” He glances over the field, spotting Aoyama standing alone, shoulder thrown back. “I’ve got an idea,” he says, turning away from Shinsou to wave at Aoyama.

“What are you doing?” Shinsou asks from behind him. “Are they really going to team up with you, even though you’re... you know?” Izuku can’t see his face, but the tone of disdain sounds almost put on. Izuku shrugs, watching as Aoyama walks over to them, a smile on his face.

“They’re all really nice, you know,” Izuku replies, glancing back at Shinsou. “I don’t think any of them have any idea of how the quirkless are normally treated. They just seemed surprised.” Shinsou blinks, slowly, then looks away.

“And you want this guy to team up with us?” He eyes Aoyama over as he approaches, one hand on his hip and a twinkle in his eye.

“Hello, Midoriya,” Aoyama says, his gaze sliding off of Shinsou and onto Izuku. “What do you need from *moi* ?” He quirks a brow up.

“Do you want to work with me and Shinsou?” Izuku asks, smiling. “I noticed you didn’t have a team quite yet.”

“Mm, yes, that would be agreeable!” Aoyama says, a smile splitting his face. “I was wondering when somebody would ask me to join them, considering the impressive abilities I possess!” He places a hand on his chest, tipping his head and giving Izuku a look that Izuku thinks is supposed to be some kind of.... Actually, Izuku has no idea. Aoyama is just looking at him like that, and Izuku is starting to regret this decision.

“Aren’t you the glittery dude?” Shinsou asks, raising an eyebrow, and Aoyama turns to him, nodding.

“Oh, yes, that’s--” his voice cuts off, and Izuku watches his eyes go blank, his hands dropping to his sides like Ojiro’s. Izuku glances over at Shinsou in time to see him sigh, rolling his eyes.

“Did you have to pick the most annoying person here?” Shinsou asks flatly, staring at Izuku. Izuku blinks. He’d honestly just picked Aoyama because he’d seen him on Shinsou’s team last time, but it’s not like he can outright *say* that.

Izuku settles for shrugging his shoulders. “I just thought we could use someone with a ranged

attack on our team,” he replies. “Does your quirk activate when someone responds to a question you ask them?”

“Doesn’t have to be a question,” Shinsou replies, his gaze slipping to look over Izuku’s shoulder, in the direction of the stage. “They just have to respond to me.” Izuku turns, seeing the teachers line up along the stage like they’d been before.

“Let’s go get our headbands,” Izuku says, and Shinsou nods.

“Follow me,” he commands, looking at Aoyama and Ojiro, who follow behind him as he starts walking to the stage. Izuku follows, and Present Mic’s announcement telling them to get their headbands starts just as they reach Midnight. She tips her head at them when they approach, looking surprised.

“Midoriya, Shinsou. I didn’t know you two were friends,” she says, reaching into a bag of headbands and searching through it.

“We’re not,” Shinsou replies, his eyes pointed at the ground. Izuku watches him.

“Not yet, anyway,” Izuku says, just as Midnight pauses, tipping her head.

“Are Aoyama and Ojiro...” She looks at them, taking in their state. “Are they on your team as well?”

Izuku nods. “Yeah! Shinsou’s the rider, by the way.” Midnight nods, passing over a headband with 390 written on it before reaching behind herself and pulling a tablet off the stage. She unlocks it and taps on the screen for a minute before turning it back off and looking up at them.

“You’re all set, then!” Midnight gives them a smile. “You’ll be in the fourth starting spot on the left side. Good luck!”

Izuku nods, opening his mouth to thank her, but Shinsou brushes past him, already walking toward their start spot. Izuku blinks, hurrying after Shinsou and their two brainwashed teammates.

“Do you have a plan in mind?” Izuku asks, walking quickly so he draws even with Shinsou.

“I’m going to wait until near the end of the time and then brainwash one of the top four teams,” Shinsou says, not looking at Izuku. “It’s the simplest way.” He steps onto their assigned spot and holds a hand out.

Izuku blinks, passing him the headband. “Makes sense. Do you have a limit to how many people you can brainwash at a time?” Shinsou glances at him from the sides of his eyes as he ties the headbands around his forehead.

“It won’t come up,” Shinsou answers, giving his head a shake, his hair fanning out over the headband.

“You should release Aoyama and Ojiro,” Izuku says. “It’s not like they can leave the team now, anyway.”

Shinsou snorts. “They can choose not to cooperate. I’m not releasing them.” He sighs, turning toward them. “I’m putting them in the back, you can be the front of the horse.”

Izuku bites his lip. “Okay. They won’t be very happy with you afterwards, though.”

"I'm not here to make friends," Shinsou says, glaring at Izuku. "I'm here to become a pro hero, not to be nice to stuck up hero course kids who have had life handed to them on a silver platter."

Izuku blinks. "Heroes need to have allies, though. They need to be able to work with others." He tips his head slightly at Shinsou. "They want to win too, you know. It's in their best interest to work with you."

Shinsou shakes his head. "Fine, but don't act surprised when they hate me anyway," he says, his voice a low growl, and Izuku sees the color bleed back into Aoyama's and Ojiro's eyes. Aoyama stumbles, like before, and Izuku knows to reach out a hand, steadying him by his shoulder. Aoyama looks up at him, blinking, but it's Ojiro who speaks first.

"What..." he shakes his head, brows furrowed. "What did you do to me?" He looks up at Shinsou, and Izuku sees a mixture of fear and confusion on his face.

"I brainwashed you," Shinsou says, shrugging. He looks over to Izuku, a smug look on his face.

"Sorry, Ojiro, Aoyama!" Izuku says, bowing a little to Ojiro. Aoyama has a hand on his shoulder, just standing there quietly. "Shinsou was worried nobody would want to team up with him, so he got nervous and used his quirk. I told him you two would want to win of your own power, though, so he let you go!" Izuku looks up, flashing his best pacifying smile at Ojiro, who blinks. Shinsou growls from next to him.

"That's not what *happened*, Midoriya," he hisses, and Izuku just shrugs.

"Isn't it?" Izuku asks, looking to Aoyama, who blinks, then smiles.

"I think we'll do wonderfully," Aoyama says, winking at Izuku. "Although, I do prefer to be asked politely rather than forced."

Ojiro nods. "Yeah..." He glances off to the side. "Same here, but I'll work with what I've got, I guess."

"Well, let's get set up, then!" Izuku smiles. "I think Aoyama should be the front of the horse, since his quirk is better suited to it than..." Izuku swallows, "than my abilities are."

Aoyama nods, and the four of them work to form the horse, just in time for Present Mic to call for the final countdown. Shinsou is settling onto Izuku and Ojiro's shoulders just as the cavalry battle officially starts.

It's different than last time, because they don't even move immediately. Izuku glances up to see Shinsou scanning the field, his face serious and focused. The other teams seem to be directing most of their attention to Team Todoroki, like last time, and it's strange for Izuku to see Todoroki teamed up with Iida, Yaoyorozu, and Kaminari. *It's a good match-up*, he thinks as he watches them evade an attack from Team Bakugou, Todoroki's mismatched hair just touching the edge of an explosion. Izuku wonders if Todoroki's used to the smell of singed hair; he must be, considering his and his father's quirks.

"We're going to stay back until closer to the end," Shinsou says from up above, glancing down at them. "My quirk is more likely to work if they don't know what to expect." Izuku remembers that Aoyama and Ojiro had been brainwashed still when Shinsou and Izuku had talked strategy.

"We're just going to rely on your quirk?" Ojiro asks, sounding frustrated. "Isn't that... I don't know, cruel?"

“How so?” Shinsou asks, a mean tone to his voice. “Did it hurt when I used it on you?”

“No, but--” Shinsou cuts Ojiro off before he can finish.

“Then I don’t see how it’s any worse than the kid with anger management issues blowing up in ten-million’s face,” Shinsou says, shrugging his shoulders. “Or is it because it’s a villain’s quirk? Because it isn’t flashy and attractive?”

Ojiro sighs. “Dude, I have a mutant quirk, I get what it’s like, but you still could have *asked* us to be on your team.” Izuku casts a glance at him, sees the uneasy set to his shoulders and the frown on his face.

“Would you have said yes?” Shinsou asks, quietly. “And you know as well as I do that psychological quirks get it worse than the kind you have.”

“G-Guys,” Izuku interrupts, tilting his head forward. “Incoming, three o’clock.” Shouji, his hands wrapped around what must be Mineta and Tsuyu on his back, charges at them, approaching from the side of the group that Izuku’s on. He’s moving quickly, the weight of his teammates not seeming to hinder him in the slightest.

“Midoriya, you said you know 1-A well, right?” Shinsou asks, gritting his teeth. “Tell me what to say to get the big guy to respond.”

Izuku blinks. “Don’t bother trying to insult his appearance,” he says, remembering a conversation Shouji had had with Tsuyu and Tokoyami. “He’s used to that. Just ask a question, he won’t be too hard to get an answer out of.” Shinsou nods, and they doge to the side, stepping out of the way of Shouji’s charge.

“Watch where you’re going!” Shinsou snaps, and Izuku notes the bright anger in his voice. He knows it must be faked, but it seems to work on Shouji.

“It’s a competition,” he says, before freezing in place, his eyes going blank. Shinsou sighs from above Izuku. Izuku glances up at him.

“There are two inside of his arms,” Izuku whispers, praying it’s loud enough for Shinsou to hear. “Tsuyu is smart, so she might be hard to get, but if you say something inappropriate, Mineta will reply.”

“Something...?” Shinsou blinks, and he leans back, barely dodging out of the way of a long, pink tongue. Izuku bites his lip, moving with his team as they back up, turning so that their front is facing the immobile Shouji.

“That’s nasty,” Shinsou says, and Izuku sees Tsuyu poke her face out from between Shouji’s arms. “Isn’t it kind of gross licking people all the time?” Tsuyu retracts her tongue, frowning.

“I don’t--” she starts to say, her face growing blank halfway through. Izuku sees that she’s wearing their headband, and he knows that Shinsou sees it too, because Shinsou tips his head slightly to the side.

“Give me your headband,” he orders, and Tsuyu reaches up, taking her headband off. A lock of her long, dark hair falls over her face as she stretches up to hand it to Shinsou, who takes it easily. Izuku hears a squeal from inside of Shouji.

“Mineta won’t be a threat,” Ojiro says. “Well. I don’t think he will be, anyway.” Izuku nods, agreeing, and Aoyama sighs as they move away from the frozen, blank Shouji.

“I wish we were doing something with a little more sparkle,” Aoyama sighs, flipping his hair. “This is just so... plain.” He says it like it’s an insult, a terrible burden to be.

Izuku huffs a small laugh. “You’ll get a chance to be dramatic in the third round, Aoyama.”

“Agreed,” Ojiro says. “Y’know, I guess I have to thank you, Midoriya. I wouldn’t have wanted to win as a puppet.”

“I-I know,” Izuku replies, glancing up at Shinsou, who’s pointedly looking out over the field. Izuku can’t help but think that it’s almost cruel of Ojiro, to keep hammering on it. *Shinsou hasn’t apologized, though, so I suppose I can’t blame Ojiro for being upset.*

“And now we wait,” Aoyama says, sighing. “At least this gives me a chance to rest after the obstacle course.”

“Wasn’t finishing forty-second enough of a rest as is?” Shinsou quips, and Izuku winces.

“Mm, no, that was just my warm up,” Aoyama replies back easily, seemingly unfazed. Izuku blinks, but doesn’t say anything.

“Hey, what’s our time at?” Ojiro asks. “I can’t see from my angle.” Izuku glances to his side, at the large clock.

“We’ve got three minutes left,” he replies, biting at his lower lip. It feels *wrong*, to win this way, but Izuku knows he doesn’t have many chances left, not if he wants to be able to reset in the third round. If he’s learned anything from being on the streets, it’s that sometimes to do good, you have to fight dirty. Izuku wonders if Shinsou feels this way about his quirk, all the time. If every victory feels like cheating. Izuku supposes his own quirk is cheating, in its own way. He’s the only one here who gets to try again.

“Let’s aim for them,” Shinsou says, nodding his head at Team Tetsutetsu where they’re running away from a clash between Team Bakugou and Team Todoroki. Shiozaki’s vines are making a barrier between them and the explosions Kacchan is unleashing, and Izuku nods.

They move forward, headed straight for the other team. They’re preoccupied, but not completely oblivious, and Izuku sees the guy in front with the big teeth notice them first, shouting something up to his teammates that Izuku can’t quite make out of the loud boom of an explosion across the field.

“Hey, green hair!” Shinsou shouts, “Nice tits!” Izuku blinks, surprised, and Shiozaki’s head whips around to look at him, a red flush and a furious expression rising on her face.

“You--” Her eyes drain of color, and Izuku sees Shinsou smirk.

“Figured I’d give that ‘something inappropriate’ a shot,” he says, glancing down at Izuku. “Give me your headbands and hold your team in place,” he shouts back at Shiozaki, whose face remains blank and impassive as her vines stretch up to rip the headbands off of Tetsutetsu’s forehead and neck, whipping them towards Shinsou as another wave of vines wrap around her teammates, securing them to the ground.

“What the hell, Shiozaki?!” Tetsutetsu exclaiming, his hand flailing after the vines with his headbands.

“Sorry, I guess your girlfriend likes *me* better,” Shinsou says, snatching the headbands out from the vines, and securing them on his head with a vicious grin.

“She’s not my--” Tetsutetsu’s face goes slack, and Izuku blinks.

“You’re really good at that,” Izuku whispers, and Shinsou snorts.

“Being an asshole? It’s really easy,” he doesn’t look down, though his eyes still pinned on the rest of Team Tetsutetsu. Izuku can’t see the guy with spiky black hair under the vines, but big-teeth is struggling to get free, grumbling and cursing under his breath.

“What the hell did you do to them?” He asks, looking up at Shinsou, and Shinsou shrugs, a playful grin on his face.

“Why don’t you ask nicely and maybe I’ll tell you?” Shinsou feigns a yawn, stretching his hands above his head. “Quickly, though, you’re just about out of time.”

“You--” He doesn’t even get the entire word out before his face goes blank, his hands dropping down and letting the vines pin them to his sides.

“Too easy,” Shinsou says, dropping the fake grin. “How much time--”

“Time’s up listeners!” Present Mic’s voice interrupts him, a cheery bright sound that reminds Izuku of last round, when they’d been dazed and defeated. Now, Izuku is injured, and they’d barely had to move, hadn’t had to struggle or run or fight. It was *easy*, really. *The hardest part was convincing Shinsou to cooperate*, Izuku thinks with a grin. *We’re going to the next round!*

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When the noonday break is called, Izuku finds himself walking toward the bathroom, just out of habit. He catches himself in front of a gate that leads out of the arena, about one hundred feet from the hallway that leads to the bathroom he’s killed himself in twice now. He’s a little dazed, he notes absently. He stops walking, turning toward the gate that faces the outside, with trees bordering the path on the other side, leaves green and broad. Izuku stares out at it, watching the gentle wind brush through the trees, sending dappled shadows over the ground.

“Midoriya,” Todoroki’s voice startles Izuku, and Izuku jumps, flinching back on reflex. He turns to see Todoroki, standing there with his hands in his pockets, his face impassive.

“T-Todoroki,” Izuku says, blinking and forcing his heart to settle back down. He takes a slow breath.

“Looks like we’re both moving on to the third round,” Todoroki says, walking past Izuku, into the shadow of the gate. “I wanted to talk to you, before the tournament.”

“O-Oh?” Izuku asks, biting at his lip. He watches Todoroki walk another few steps, his back to Izuku when he speaks again.

“There’s something going on with you,” he says, voice contemplative. “I don’t know what it is, but there’s something unusual. You’re hiding something big, Midoriya.”

“I-I’m not-- there’s not anything I-like--” Izuku cuts himself off when Todoroki turns back to face him, his blue and grey eyes facing him.

“I know that something happened, between the first and second rounds, Midoriya.” Todoroki looks up and down Izuku’s form. “Not only that, but you’ve attracted special attention from Aizawa-sensei.”

“T-That’s just because I’m quirkless...” Izuku says, rubbing a hand on the back of his neck. “Look, T-Todoroki, I really don’t have anything like what you’re saying going on with me.”

Todoroki tilts his head slightly to the side, his eyes narrowing. “I don’t believe you,” he answers. “You know things you shouldn’t. And you act differently, sometimes. Like you have some hidden insight.” He blinks, slow and calm. “I’m going to beat you anyway, though. I have no choice.”

Izuku blinks, swallowing around the lump rising in his throat. “Y-You don’t?” Todoroki looks down, at the shadowed ground.

“Have you ever heard of quirk marriages?” he asks, voice quietly. “You know who my father is, of course.”

Izuku blinks. “E-Endeavor, right?” He’d heard about it, of course.

“Yes,” Todoroki answers, looking off to the side. The position hides his burned side from Izuku, and Izuku gets a horrible feeling that he knows where this is going.

“My mother’s family was easy to convince. When the number two hero wants your daughter’s hand in marriage, it’s simpler to just agree, after all.” Todoroki tips his head to the side, a flash of anger crossing his face. “He only wanted her for her quirk. With it, he created *me*. I’m nothing but a tool, Midoriya, and I *hate* it.” Izuku swallows.

“Todoroki...” He breathes, and Todoroki’s head snaps to stare into his eyes.

“As I remember it, my mother was always crying. She’d grown to hate this left side of mine, you see...” Todoroki raises one hand, his fingers brushing against the scar over his eyes. “Or at least that’s what she told me when she poured boiling water onto my face.” Izuku gasps, clasping a hand over his mouth. Todoroki’s face is twisted, full of pain and fear and anger.

“I’m going to rise to the top, without using my father’s quirk,” Todoroki says, dropping his hand. “You understand, though, how angry it would make him if I lost to you. When you’re quirkless.” Todoroki clenches his fists into tight balls by his sides, and Izuku can see the muscles in his forearms tensing. “So, no matter what you’ve got going on, no matter what your secret is... I’m going to win. And I’m going to do it with only my right side.” Todoroki steps toward him, and Izuku can feel the cold radiating off of him, like an opened freezer door or a blast from a winter storm. Todoroki turns, walking back out, towards where the mess hall for the arena is, but Izuku steps forward.

“I was given a second chance,” Izuku says, and the other boy pauses, glancing back over his shoulder. “I... I wouldn’t be here, but I got lucky. I got to try again. I keep *getting* second chances,” Izuku looks down at his hands, sees them starting to shake. “People keep doing things for me, forgiving me for my mistakes. People who I’d thought... who I’d thought hated me, they’re giving me a chance to be friends again. Things that *should* end it, for me, that should mean I have to give up, they *don’t*. It sound stupid, compared to what you’ve been through, but...” Izuku looks up, squeezing his hands into fists.

“I’m not going to waste all of the extra chances I’ve been getting. I’m not going to throw away how lucky I am by losing. So, that’s my declaration to you,” Izuku swallows, grinning wide. “I’m going to beat you. If not now,” Izuku takes a step forward, determination filling him. “Then next time.”

CW: canonical child abuse (todoroki

I HOPE U ENJOYED!!!! gahhh ive been dying to write this stuff with todoroki and with shinsou!!

thank you for all of your comments!!! they feed my soul and allow me to write :3

here's the link to the discord!!! <https://discord.gg/Vqaj62ceCt>

sports festival, part 4

Chapter Summary

last time: izuku moves on to round three, taking third place in the cavalry battle with the help of shinsou !

Chapter Notes

HI!!! there may not be an update tomorrow, but im going to try my best. we're moving my younger brother into his dorm for the first time, and it's a 4.5 hour drive each way. i don't think im the one driving, but im not very fast at writing on my phone anyway so idk if it'll get done in time. im gonna try my best to get a chapter out though!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

After eating, Izuku leaves the mess hall alone, stepping outside into the spring air. It's getting warmer as the day moves on, and now that Izuku's stomach is full of good food and he's not in the middle of the competition, it's really pleasant. Izuku could take a nap out here, if he was the napping type, so he's not surprised to see Aizawa there, leaning against the side of the building with his head tipped back, looking up at the trees.

"S-Sensei," Izuku says, lifting a hand in a small wave when Aizawa tips his head to the side, looking at him.

"Midoriya," Aizawa straightens up, unfolding his arms where they'd been crossed over his chest and sliding his hands into his pockets instead as he straightens up. "I've been wanting to talk to you."

Izuku blinks. "Y-You have?" He shifts his feet, the sensation of the sandy path scraping under his feet soothing. It reminds him of being on patrol.

Aizawa nods. "You've done well to make it this far. The tournament is going to be more difficult for you, though." He looks down at Izuku. "Don't be afraid to fight dirty. You're working at an inherent disadvantage against most of your peers. Have you seen the tournament bracket?"

Izuku shakes his head. "I was about to go look," he answers.

"You're up against Sero first," Aizawa says. "I don't want any of class 1-A to lose because you were too busy being nice to your classmates." He narrows his eyes slightly at Izuku. "Something tells me you're one of the most likely to do something like that."

Izuku feels his face flush. "I-I wouldn't lose on *purpose*," he responds, biting at his lower lip.

"No, you wouldn't." Aizawa sighs. "But you'd risk it, if it meant helping your friends. What would you have done in the second round if Ojiro and Aoyama had refused to work with Shinsou?" Aizawa raises a hand just as Izuku opens his mouth to ask how he knew. "Ojiro spoke with me

about it afterward.” Izuku blinks, pausing to take a breath before he answers, because he can’t exactly tell Aizawa, *well, I would have gone to the bathroom and slit my wrists* .

“They wouldn’t have,” Izuku says, voice firm. “And they didn’t.”

“It was a gamble,” Aizawa replies. “One you took to help your classmates, at a potential detriment to yourself.”

Izuku shakes his head. “It’s not a gamble if I knew what was going to happen,” he answers. “I know Aoyama and Ojirō better than that.” He watches Aizawa arch an eyebrow at him.

“You’re a strange one, Midoriya,” Aizawa sighs. “Go, get ready for your matches. Just keep what I said in mind.” He waves a hand, shooing Izuku away.

“I will!” Izuku chirps in response, waving at Aizawa as he walks back down the path.

--

Izuku stands in the tunnel, looking out on the field. His hands are sweating, and he wipes his palms on the fabric of his sports uniform, taking a deep, steadying breath. The tunnel is dark, despite the bright light of the sun illuminating the field ahead. Izuku can see the arena, the square marked off with white tape that must be where his match against Sero will take place. *It’s unfortunate that I’m going first* , Izuku thinks. *But it means I have less time to make myself nervous, at least* .

“Young Midoriya,” Izuku blinks, turning to see All Might, in his skeletal form. Izuku swallows, tipping his head to the side. *I haven’t seen him like this, not since that day on the roof*.

“All Might...” Izuku swallows, watches as All Might chuckles, looking off to the side.

“So it was you, on the roof that day. I’d thought I was remembering right, but...” All Might rubs a hand on the back of his neck, grimacing. “I wanted to apologize to you, and to offer some words of encouragement.”

“A-Apologize...?” Izuku blinks, unsure. He’s mostly gotten past his resentment of All Might that he’d held for a few weeks after the incident, but he still... He hasn’t thought of the number one hero as the type to remember him, not when he hadn’t brought up that fateful day even once, not when he hadn’t seemed to notice Izuku in class, not really.

All Might nods. “It seems I was wrong about you. I’m sorry for telling you that you couldn’t be a hero. It was wrong of me to crush your dream like that.” He tips his head down, in a slight bow. “I came to wish you luck. I... I dismissed you, based on your quirkless status. I didn’t take the time to see what other traits you had, and I feel it cost us both.” He looks up at Izuku, clenching a fist. “Prove me wrong, young Midoriya. I know you can.”

Izuku feels tears, hot and wet building up in his eyes. “Y-You really mean it?” He looks at All Might, watches the man smile slightly, his teeth large and bright on his emaciated face.

“I do. Now, get out there and do your best. Go beyond!” All Might raises his right fist, in his signature move, and Izuku mirrors him, grinning.

“Plus Ultra!” Izuku cheers, quietly but brightly. He feels a spark of something, bright and happy and *proud* bubble in his chest as he turns, walking out onto the field. Sero emerges from the other side, a bright grin on his face as they step into the ring.

“Hey Midoriya,” Sero says, putting one hand on his hip as they face each other. “I’m not gonna go

easy on you, just sayin'."

Izuku grins back. "I wouldn't expect you to," he replies, and Sero nods, grinning still.

"The first match!" Present Mic's voice booms over the field. "We have Izuku Midoriya, the quirkless hero course student who participated in that surprise steal of third place in the cavalry battle, versus Hanta Sero, from the same class in the hero course! His tape dispensing quirk proved quite useful in landing him and the rest of his team second place in the last round."

"The rules are simple! You win by either immobilizing your opponent, knocking them out of the ring, or getting them to say 'I give up'! We have Recovery Girl and a medical team on standby, so go all out. Fighting dirty is also perfectly fine! This isn't a battle of ethics!" Present Mic laughs, and Izuku remembers Aizawa's advice from earlier. "Killing is, of course, not allowed! If it gets to that point, Cementoss will step in. Ready?" Izuku takes a deep breath, raising his fists in a fighting stance.

"Start!" Present Mic cries out, and Izuku sees Sero pull his elbows up, aiming his tape dispensers at Izuku's face. Izuku ducks, twisting out of the way as two long strips of clear tape shoot past him, glistening in the sunlight. They fly past the ring, their cut ends fluttering when they land.

"Sorry, Midoriya," Sero says, shrugging as he walks toward him. "It's kind of unfair to you, huh? One on one like this," he shoots out another strip of tape, and Izuku dodges again, glancing down to check his position. He's still well within bounds.

"Really?" Izuku says, sliding back into a fighting stance and darting forward, towards Sero. "I don't think it's unfair at all." He slides under a shot of tape aimed a little too high and throws a punch, quick and sharp, to Sero's stomach. Izuku hears Sero gasp, his face twisting into a grimace as Izuku grabs the front of his uniform with his other hand and pulls Sero into his knee as he raises it up to slam into Sero's ribs. Izuku clenching his teeth in sympathy as he feels the hard impact into his classmate's chest, hearing Sero's breath rush out of him. Izuku slides back just as Sero shoots out a strand of tape at him, dodging it.

"Damn, Midoriya," Sero wheezes, clutching his stomach with one hand. "You're pretty good!" He raises both elbows, shooting a volley of tape out that Izuku has to roll on the ground to dodge, the sandy ground scuffing against his shoulder as he somersaults out of the way. Izuku curses internally as he feels a piece of tape, sticky and tight, wrap around his bicep as he gets to his feet.

"Gotcha," Sero says, breaking the tape off of his elbow dispenser and gripping it with his hands, tugging on it and yanking Izuku to the side. Izuku digs his heels into the ground, his eyes on the white barrier of the ring as he's dragged toward the boundary.

"Not... yet..." he growls as he reaches forward, grabbing the tape between him and Sero and dragging himself forward, like he's climbing a rope. The tape is thicker than he'd thought, and it makes it easier for him to get a grip, hauling himself forward towards Sero.

Sero grimaces, dropping the tape he's holding and letting it go slack. Izuku nearly falls from the lack of tension, but he catches himself in time, running at Sero. Sero flinches back, but Izuku sweeps his legs with one of his, and Sero goes tumbling to the ground. Just before his back hits the ground, Izuku sees him raise his elbow, and a piece of tape shoots out, smacking into Izuku's chest and dragging him down on top of him.

Izuku bites down on the tip of his tongue when he falls, accidentally filling his mouth with the taste of iron. He lands on top of Sero, getting an elbow to the face and a knee to the gut. *At least I'm not underneath him*, he thinks, struggling to get somewhat upright so that he can attempt to

hold Sero in some kind of... headlock, or something. Izuku fumbles, struggling as Sero writhes underneath him. Izuku hisses in frustration as Sero shoves a hand in his face, pushing him off of him.

Izuku flips over, hopping into a crouch just as Sero sits up and shoots a piece of tape that wraps itself around Izuku's forearm, tugging him forward as Sero readies a punch.. Izuku jerks himself to the side, and Sero's punch flies right over his shoulder. Izuku, suddenly, remembers something from on the streets, and he leans forward without thinking, sinking his teeth into the meat of Sero's forearm.

"Hey!" Sero shouts, shaking his arm, but Izuku bites down harder, trying to elbow Sero in the ribs without looking. "What the hell, man?" Sero gives his arm a firm shake, dislodging Izuku. Izuku backs away, hopping to his feet and getting back into a fighting stance just in time for Sero to stand up, shaking his arm out and grimacing. Izuku can taste blood in his mouth, but he's not sure if it's from when he'd bit his own tongue earlier or if it's Sero's.

"Did you really *bite* me?!" Sero asks incredulously, looking down at his arm. Izuku sees the red, bleeding ring he'd left, but he doesn't hesitate, barrelling forward to shove Sero back. Sero flails, backing up, cursing and trying to dig his feet into the ground as Izuku gives him a firm shove, pushing him over the edge of the ring with a groan.

"Sero is out of bounds!" Present Mic announces as Sero lands on the ground, his butt on the dirt just outside the white tape. He's caught himself on his hands, and he's looking up at Izuku with a stunned look on his face. "Midoriya moves on to the second round!"

Izuku blinks, then holds out a hand to Sero. "Sorry about that..." he says, giving Sero a sheepish smile. "I couldn't think of anything else." Sero blinks up at him, then grins wide, reaching up to take his hand.

"Dude, don't apologize. That was *awesome*. It's my fault for underestimating you," he says, and Izuku helps pull him to his feet. "You know your nose is bleeding, right?" Sero points to his own nose, and Izuku blinks, reaching up to wipe his sleeve across his face. He looks down at it, sees the smear of bright blood.

"I didn't even notice," Izuku replies, glancing up at Sero. He's got a smear of blood on his forehead that isn't his, and his face is starting to bruise. Izuku looks at his arms, sees what looks kind of like carpet burn from sliding around on the ground as well as the ring shaped bite mark from Izuku. It looks like two matching crescents, red and already swelling. Now that they're up close, Izuku can see that only a few places are bleeding, but the whole thing looks like it'll make a nasty bruise.

"You were smart to wear the long-sleeved uniform," Sero comments, brushing dirt off of his arms and wincing. "The ground here isn't very forgiving." Izuku nods, not saying that he hadn't thought of that at all. *I wear this to hide my cuts*, he thinks, *but it did come in handy*.

"Come on," Izuku startles, turning to see Aizawa walking up to them, his hands in his pockets. "Let's get you two to Recovery Girl and get you patched up." He looks at them, a faint smile on his lips. "You both did very well."

Izuku grins up at him. "I listened to what you said, about fighting dirty."

Aizawa raises an eyebrow. "I noticed," he says, and Izuku swears the little huff of air he lets out next is a laugh.

--

“Nervous?” Uraraka leans on the table in Izuku’s prep room. She’s changed into casual clothes, since she didn’t make it into the third round.

“A little,” Izuku admits. He’s all fixed up, courtesy of Recovery Girl, but his head kind of hurts and he’s still a little tired from it. He didn’t get to watch Todoroki’s first match, and facing him so early in the competition is making Izuku’s palms sweat. Even though Uraraka has described Todoroki’s opening move, a huge wall of ice, to him in excruciating detail, Izuku can’t think up a way around it.

“You’ll be okay,” Uraraka says, patting him on the top of his head with one hand. “It matters more that you stand out, right? I think you did that just fine in your first match, really.” Izuku nods.

“I don’t want to lose right away, though.” Izuku picks at his cuticles, twisting his hands on the tabletop. “I want to make him work for it.”

Uraraka giggles. “Are you gonna bite him, too?” Izuku feels his face heat up.

“T-That--” He stumbles on his words, his face surely bright red.

Uraraka cuts him off. “It was hilarious! And,” she meets his gaze, looking serious, “it was genius. I think we’ve all been underestimating you, Deku.”

Izuku looks away. “I-It wasn’t *that* smart...” It was instinctual. He hadn’t planned it out.

“It was *great* .” Uraraka pats his head, again, then sighs. Izuku looks up to see her rolling her eyes. “You’re too humble, Deku. Get down there and kick some ass, okay?”

Izuku nods smiling at her. “I-I’ll try!” He says, standing up and turning to glance at the clock. Uraraka’s right that he needs to head down; there’s about five minutes until the start of the match. He starts towards the door, and Uraraka follows him.

“I’ll walk with you until the tunnel, okay?” She smiles at him, and Izuku smiles back at her gratefully. They walk in relative silence, the sounds of their soft footsteps against the tile of the building filling the space.

Izuku knows that he’s died twice, during the festival. They’ve been to different reset points, but he really doesn’t know if there’s enough time between them for it to matter. He only has about two or three more deaths in him before he won’t be in any state to fight, and it makes him nervous, his heart picking up in its beating and his palms sweating. He doesn’t want to take the gamble of dying and losing in the first round next time, but how could he beat Todoroki? Would he even *make* it to a fight with Todoroki, next time?

The thing is, Izuku knows his best chance of getting far in the festival is to reset and hope he gets easier matches. He’s seen the bracket; if he beats Todoroki, he’s probably up against Kacchan in the semifinals, anyway. He *knows* he can’t beat Kacchan in a one on one in an open space, as much as it hurts.

But Izuku doesn’t want to just win. It’s stupid and it’s naive and he *knows* that, but he wants to fight Todoroki and he wants to make him use his fire. He wants to show Todoroki that his fire isn’t his father’s. That it’s *his* . Izuku doesn’t know why. He doesn’t know why he cares, but he thinks it has something to do with the way Todoroki found him, twice. The way Todoroki trusted him with his story, even when Izuku hadn’t really told *him* anything. Izuku doesn’t get that from people. Kacchan sees him as a rival, but not a threat, not an equal. Todoroki had challenged him. He’d said

he wouldn't lose, said it like it was a possibility in the first place.

It makes Izuku want to win. As he steps through the doors to the tunnel, he turns and looks at Uraraka, smiling at her.

"Good luck, Deku!" She grins back at him. He nods to her, stepping through into the tunnel. It's the same as last round, dim and calm and quiet. All Might isn't there waiting, though. Across the field, in the other tunnel, Izuku can see an orange glow. *Endeavor*, he realizes, as he watches the fiery man gesture. He can barely make out Todoroki in the shadows, looking up at his father. Izuku wishes he could see their faces, could hear their conversation, but he can't.

Izuku takes a deep, steadying breath, and steps out of the tunnel, into the field. He's surprised to hear cheers, loud and bright from the audience, and when he looks up, he sees a group of class 1-A, cheering him on. He can see Sero up there, and Izuku grins when Sero mimes biting his own arm and gives Izuku a thumbs up.

Izuku glances back toward the other tunnel just in time to see Todoroki step out, his expression dark and his face shadowed by his hair. A similar cheer rises up from the audience, but it doesn't feel the same, not with the haunted look on Todoroki's face. Izuku swallows, turning to face him completely.

"Are you ready for the second round?!" Present Mic shouts. "Both from class 1-A, we have Shouto Todoroki and Izuku Midoriya! Todoroki is quite an impressive character, defeating his first opponent in mere seconds in the first round. Midoriya is a bit of an underdog, but he pulled through with a decisive victory last round. Let's pay close attention to this one!" Izuku watches Todoroki take a deep breath, an icy mist coming from his nostrils.

"Ready?" Izuku swallows, tensing and getting ready to dodge. His muscles feel like live wires, tense and painful.

"Go!" Present Mic screams, and Izuku rushes forward, dashing low to the ground at Todoroki's feet. Todoroki sees him coming, of course--there's nowhere to hide.

As Izuku slides forward, he sees Todoroki raise one hand, not even flinching away. His right hand comes up, and Izuku sees the starburst of ice bloom out from it before it overtakes him, a wave of thick blue ice that wraps around Izuku's limbs, pinning him in his position. Izuku can hear the crackling of the wave as it keeps growing, pulling Izuku back and up. It stops, and Todoroki drops his hand, frost falling from where it's gathered on his clothes.

"Midoriya, can you move?" Midnight asks from the sidelines, sighing. Izuku swallows, tugging at his arms. The cold of the ice is painful, stinging and burning at his skin, and no matter how hard he pulls, he can't rip his arms loose.

"N-No..." he replies, hating the way his voice shakes and quivers. *I can't win against him*, he thinks, his head spinning. *He's too powerful. What was I thinking? Making him use his fire? I'd be lucky to last five minutes.*

"The match is over!" Present Mic shouts, as bubbly as ever. "Just like his first round, Todoroki wins in a matter of moments. We'll take a short break to clear the field, like last time." The audience is murmuring, a heavy chatter that fills Izuku's head. He tries to move his arms, but they don't budge.

Todoroki walks up to him, his face dark and his brows low. He looks almost *sad* as he presses his left hand to Izuku's chest, a burst of steam coming off of Izuku's uniform as the ice starts to melt.

“Sorry, I went a little overboard,” Todoroki says, looking at Izuku’s chest and not his eyes. “I was just angry is all.” Izuku swallows, not replying as he’s released from the ice. He falls out of the wave of it, barely landing on his feet. *I’m shivering*, he notes, holding his hands up to look at them.

“Are you... okay?” Todoroki asks, glancing up at his face, then back down at the ground. He drops his hands, holding them by his side. “Nevermind,” he says, turning on his heels and walking back towards his tunnel.

Izuku blinks, takes a deep breath, and turns, too. He walks into the tunnel, feeling the murmurs and the shouts of the audience on his back, even though he *knows* they’re just cheering for Todoroki’s win. Izuku feels like they’re mocking him. He sees Aizawa, leaning against the side wall of the tunnel, but doesn’t look at him, just walks by.

“Midoriya,” Aizawa says, and Izuku hears him following him. “Where are you going?”

“I want to be alone,” Izuku replies, distantly. He doesn’t feel like he’s really here. He isn’t, not for long, anyway. Aizawa doesn’t reply right away, but Izuku can still hear his footsteps, can hear him sigh.

“Is that a good idea?” Aizawa asks, and Izuku turns to look at him.

“Why wouldn’t it be?” Izuku replies, sliding his gaze back forward when he thinks he sees concern on his teacher’s face. “I’m fine. I just want to be alone.” *Todoroki is the one who needs support right now, anyway*.

“Okay,” Aizawa replies. He follows Izuku into the building anyway. Izuku wants to hit him, for some reason, but he doesn’t. He walks down the hallway without looking back until he doesn’t hear footsteps behind him anymore.

The bathroom is too risky, he thinks, walking along the hallway until he spots what he’s looking for. It’s an unassuming door, shut tightly, with the label “janitorial” on the wall beside it. Izuku tries the handle, surprised when it opens readily. He slips inside, not bothering to turn on the lights.

It’s pitch black in the closet, and when he fumbles behind him, he finds the lock for the door. It turns with a click, and Izuku sighs, pressing his eyes shut for just a moment. When he opens them again, they’ve started adjusting to the darkness. Izuku can see a shelf, laden with chemicals, a janitor’s cart, bright yellow and ready for use, and a tiled area with a drain in the bottom and a faucet up top. *For washing the cart*, he thinks, and Izuku walks over to it. It smells awful, like ammonia and artificial lemons.

Izuku sits on the tile, holds his wrists above the drain, and slices himself open. If he shuts his eyes and concentrates on the smell of his own blood, he can almost pretend he feels okay.

--

Izuku blinks awake in the mess hall, his spoon clattering to the table when it falls out of his hand. It splashes miso soup onto his hand and the table.

“Deku?” Uraraka tips her head at him, across the table.

“You okay man?” Kirishima leans forward, reaches in front of Kacchan and leans over the table to pass Izuku a napkin. “You got kinda pale all of a sudden.”

“I-I’m okay,” Izuku says, taking the napkin with a shaky hand. “I just spaced out.”

Uraraka frowns, furrowing her brow. “Are you sure?”

“I’m going to get some air,” Izuku chokes out, standing up and pushing his chair back. The whole table is looking at him, Kirishima and Uraraka and Kacchan and Iida and--Izuku can’t take it. He turns, not caring how it looks, and hurries out of the mess hall, hands clenched into fists at his sides. It feels like every sound in the mess hall is burning his skin, and he can’t handle it. He rushes outside, almost running, and the bright spring sunshine sends a shiver down his spine. Izuku freezes, outside the mess hall, staring up at the leaves, lit from above by the sky, too bright and too pretty for how he feels. He doesn’t know what he wants, doesn’t know if he wants to curl up somewhere dark and quiet or if he wants to punch a wall or if he wants to open a vein. He wants to beat Todoroki, he thinks. He wants to be less of a failure, maybe.

“Midoriya?” Aizawa is leaning against the side of the mess hall, because of *course* he is. Izuku can’t catch a break. He glances at Aizawa, sees surprise, maybe, on his face.

“Sensei,” Izuku says, and his voice cracks, embarrassingly. Aizawa’s brow furrows.

“Are you alright?” He straightens up, pulling himself off the side of the building and stepping forward, looking Izuku over. Izuku stares back at him.

“I-I’m...” Izuku blinks. He shakes his head. “I’m fine,” he answers, and Aizawa raises an eyebrow at him.

“You don’t look ‘fine,’” He raises a hand, presses the back of it to Izuku’s forehead. “Hmm. Come with me,” he says, turning and walking into the trees. Izuku follows, his feet dragging through the grass. Izuku reaches out a hand as he passes a tree, scraping his palm against it. The bark is rough and cool, and the sensation is grounding, just a little. He blinks, trying to keep his focus, but he can’t.

Aizawa stops, and Izuku pauses looking around. They’re in a clearing in the woods, a little circle where the sunlight drifts down from above freely, not broken up by the leaves. Aizawa turns to face Izuku.

“It’s quieter, over here,” he says, his gaze moving over Izuku’s face. Izuku nods. “Do you know what’s wrong?”

Izuku swallows, shakes his head. “I-I think I’m nervous,” he says, looking at the ground. The grass is a mix of greens, the blades long and untrimmed. He can see an ant crawling up a thin blade, a little black body that sways with the wind.

“About the tournament?” Aizawa asks. Izuku glances up at him.

“Y-Yeah,” Izuku murmurs. “I don’t want to... I don’t want to lose in an instant,” he says, his voice cracking. “I’m so *weak* .”

Aizawa sighs. “You’re not weak, Midoriya. You’re *learning* .” He reaches forward, setting a hand on Izuku’s shoulder. The contact is warm, heavy, and it brings Izuku back to himself just a little.

“I’m quirkless,” Izuku says, clenching the muscles of his jaw. “How am I supposed to beat someone like Todoroki? Or Kacchan?” Aizawa blinks, slowly, his face saying calm, but filling with something like understanding.

“You work hard and you train harder,” Aizawa says. “The quirk doesn’t make the hero, Midoriya.” He sighs, squeezing Izuku’s shoulder. “Even if you lose here, you have a lot of time ahead of you. You’ll get stronger.”

Izuku nods, swallowing. “I’m sorry for bothering you,” he says, twisting his hands together. “It was your lunch break, and I’m being stupid.”

“You’re not bothering me,” Aizawa says, voice firm, “and you’re not being stupid. It’s my job to help you kids through these things.”

Izuku nods, biting at his lip. “D-Do you know if the tournament bracket is released yet?” He needs to know if his reset point is before or after the randomization. If he’s paired against Sero again, he knows he’ll do fine, but he doesn’t know what to do against Todoroki.

Aizawa takes his hand off of Izuku’s shoulder, reaching into his pocket instead. “Let’s check,” he says, fishing out his phone and messing with it for a moment. “It’s up,” he says, scrolling through something.

Izuku leans forward. “W-Who am I against?” He can’t see Aizawa’s screen, but Aizawa turns it for him, showing him the bracket.

“You’re up in the fourth match, against Aoyama.” Aizawa holds the phone out still, tucking one hand into his pocket. “Don’t hold back on him just because you teamed up with him in the cavalry battle.”

Izuku nods, eyes still on the bracket. “I won’t,” he says, reading. “If I win, I’ll face Kacchan in the second round...” Aizawa hums, turning the phone back to look at it.

“Either him or Monoma from class 1-B,” Aizawa says, looking at the screen impassively. “You don’t know for certain that Bakugou would win.”

Izuku nods. “R-Right,” he says, because he supposes he doesn’t know. Not yet, anyway.

Chapter End Notes

cw: dissociation, canonical child abuse

thank you for reading!!! as always, i appreciate all the comments and support :D i think the sports festival arc will take up about 3-4 more chapters, making it the longest arc yet! hopefully it's plenty interesting despite the length!

for your convenience, the link to the discord server for this fic:
<https://discord.gg/Vqaj62ceCt>

sports festival, part 5

Chapter Summary

last time: izuku beat sero but lost to todoroki in the third round of the sports festival

Chapter Notes

HI GUYS!!! sorry again about not updating yesterday, but it was super busy so i didn't really stand a chance at writing! im posting today's chapter a little earlier than normal, and im gonna try to have two chapters either tomorrow or tuesday to make up for it! today's chapter was really fun to write, so i hope you enjoy!

also omg... over 100k words!!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

When Izuku steps into the tunnel again, he isn't surprised to see All Might there. He moves through the conversation, trying to match his words from the first time the best he can. He thinks All Might can tell something is off, but he doesn't comment on it if he does. It's refreshing to not have to explain himself. It's also nice to hear the apology again, even if it's not a surprise this time through.

When All Might turns to leave, Izuku turns to face the field, that same view he's seen twice already. He wonders how many more times he'll get to see it from this view, as one of the competitors. He can see Aoyama, too, looking nervous in the light spilling into his own tunnel. Izuku smiles at him, but he doesn't think Aoyama can see his face from this distance.

Izuku walks forward, out into the field. It's still dazzlingly bright as he walks into the ring. Aoyama seems to be enjoying it, though, waving at the audience and grinning brightly. When he steps into the ring, their eyes meet, and Izuku smiles back at Aoyama, who nods.

"For our next match, we have Izuku Midoriya and Yuuga Aoyama, both from class 1-A! These two were on the same team for the cavalry battle and pulled off a surprise steal of third place." Present Mic sounds the same as always. It's a nice constant throughout this. Izuku hasn't listened to his radio show regularly since starting at UA, but he thinks he might start again.

"Ready?" He asks, and Izuku drops into a fighting stance. Aoyama lifts his hands to rest on the back of his head and winks at Izuku.

"Start!" As soon as he speaks, Aoyama is firing off his navel laser, a brilliant, shining beam that Izuku dodges easily. He steps to the side, dashing forward at Aoyama as the beam dissipates, dissolving into a faint trace of glitter in the air. Izuku pulls his leg back, aiming a solid kick. It collides with the ridge of Aoyama's hip, and Izuku grits his teeth as it knocks Aoyama almost to the ground, the man folding over for just a second before catching himself.

"You're fast, Midoriya," Aoyama says, leaning back and firing a laser that Izuku just barely

manages to slide out of the way of. He can feel the buzz of energy as it grazes the edge of his uniform, burning away the fabric there and leaving a ripped patch just above his left knee. Izuku uses the momentum from the dodge to propel himself forward, sweeping a leg into Aoyama's ankles.

This time, Aoyama does fall, and Izuku watches him land on hands and knees, biting his lip and looking up at Izuku. Izuku grimaces, not really looking forward to this next part, then throws himself on Aoyama's back, his knees driving into the space between Aoyama's shoulder blades. Izuku hears the sharp exhale of breath when it knocks the wind out of his friend.

"Sorry, Aoyama," Izuku says, planting one hand on the back of Aoyama's head and shoving it down into the ground. "But if I let you up, you can use your quirk. I can't afford to get hurt here." Aoyama coughs, trying to press himself up off of the ground with his hands, his elbows shaking with the effort.

"You're something extraordinary, Midoriya," Aoyama wheezes out. "I give up." Izuku blinks in surprise, just as Midnight raises a hand.

"Aoyama has conceded! The match goes to Midoriya!" She glances up, presumably at the announcers' stand, and Izuku hears Present Mic repeating the ruling more loudly. Izuku doesn't really listen; he's too preoccupied with releasing Aoyama's neck and standing up, trying to put as little extra pressure on Aoyama's back as possible.

"W-Why did you concede?" Izuku asks, offering a hand to Aoyama. "We'd only just started."

Aoyama smiles at him, a sly smile that Izuku can't read. "I know when I've been beat," he says, taking Izuku's hand. "It did not strike me as particularly elegant to drag out a battle I knew I could not win." He lifts himself up with Izuku's help, but he doesn't release Izuku's hand.

"How do you know that you would have lost?" Izuku says, looking down at where Aoyama's hand is still clasped around his own.

"Because," Aoyama says, a sage look on his face. "There was absolutely no way I could have gotten you off of my back." He nods, then releases Izuku's hand. Izuku squints at him.

"What?" He asks, and Aoyama just shrugs, flipping his hair out of his face and turning to walk toward the tunnel he'd come in from.

"Au revoir, Midoriya," Aoyama says in response, giving him a quick wave before turning away. Izuku stares after him, then shakes his head.

"I don't get that guy," he mutters, turning to walk back toward his own tunnel. *At least this means I stand a chance of actually getting to fight Todoroki this round*, he thinks, even though he doubts that his second match would go quite this well. Not if it's Kacchan he's facing.

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Izuku settles into his seat in the stands, wrapping his hands around the grips on the seat. Uraraka beams at him from the seat next to him.

"Hey Deku, you totally destroyed Aoyama!" She says, gesturing with her hands. "He didn't even stand a chance before you just--" she makes a noise with her mouth, something like a whoosh, and Izuku nods, smiling despite himself.

"I-I guess I did okay," he says, shrugging. From Uraraka's other side, Iida leans forward, a bright

smile on his face.

“You did exceedingly well, Midoriya! I can only hope I’ll have the chance to face you later on.” Iida says, meeting Izuku’s gaze, and Izuku looks away, biting his lip.

“W-Well, I’ll probably be facing Kacchan next, so...” he trails off, and he hears an understanding sigh from Uraraka.

“You beat him in the training exercise, didn’t you?” She says, and Izuku looks up to see a soft smile on her face. “He’s up next, by the way.” She points to the field, and Izuku looks down. Kacchan and Monoma look like spiky and smooth versions of the same haircut as they walk out into the field. Izuku swallows. He doesn’t think he’s ready, to face Kacchan one on one like this.

As much as Uraraka is right that I beat him in battle training, he thinks, gripping the arms of the chair hard as the two combatants step into the ring together, *I have never been able to win against Kacchan one on one. I don’t stand a chance.*

“It’s time for the next match,” Present Mic says. “First up, we’ve got Katsuki Bakugou from class 1-A! He got off to quite an *explosive* start in the first two rounds!” The audience laughs, and Izuku leans forward, trying to see Kacchan’s expression. It’s impossible to tell from the distance, but Izuku would guess that Kacchan is already pissed, judging from the small sparks popping around his palms where they’re held at his sides.

“He’ll be facing off against Neito Monoma, from class 1-B. This hero course student showed off his powerful copying quirk in the second round when he and Bakugou fought each other for that first place spot! Now, they’ll finally get a rematch, one on one. Are we ready?” The audience cheers, and Izuku watches Kacchan slide into a crouch, ready to fight. Monoma doesn’t move, hands on his hips.

“Start!” Izuku watches Kacchan burst forward, twisting his body in preparation for his right hook. Izuku bites his lip, leaning forward in the seat.

“You’re telegraphing,” he whispers, and sure enough, Monoma dodges easily, tapping one hand on the side of Kacchan’s arm as the punch flies past him. Izuku grits his teeth, shaking his head as Kacchan dives in for another hit, an explosion on the palm of his hand that Monoma easily deflects with one of his own.

“Nice quirk,” Monoma says, his voice projected so the audience can hear. A screen hovering over the stands across from Izuku and his friends shows a close up of Monoma’s face as he smirks.

“But mine’s better,” he says, ducking forward and slamming a hand into Kacchan’s chest, the motion exploding with pops of bright light. Izuku winces as Kacchan goes skidding back, a hand pressed to his chest for a moment before he reorients himself. *I know how that one feels*, he thinks. Kacchan doesn’t hesitate though, sliding back into a fighting stance.

“Shut up,” Kacchan growls. “Can’t you come up with your own fucking moves?” He snarls, before moving forward in a clear repetition of his earlier right hook. Izuku winces, but can’t look away, and he blinks in surprise as Kacchan drops his fist at the last second, turning the twisting momentum of his punch into a low side kick that hits Monoma square in the stomach as the boy dodges. Izuku sees the way Monoma leans over, coughing to catch his breath, and Kacchan doesn’t hesitate, lobbing an explosive punch at the other boy’s face.

The explosion covers the field for a moment, and Izuku strains, trying to see either of them among the bright pops of explosion and the dark smoke. He grits his teeth, literally on the edge of his seat.

“Is it over...?” Uraraka asks beside him, and Izuku glances over to see that she’s just as engrossed as he is. The field finally, finally starts to clear, and Izuku blinks, reaching a hand to cover his mouth. Monoma and Kacchan are right on the edge of the field, standing with the white tape beside them as they exchange punches and kicks. It’s clear that Kacchan is a better fighter, but Monoma has a grin on his face, and whatever he’s saying right now isn’t being projected. Kacchan seems to be reacting to it, and Izuku sees the exact moment Monoma says something that pisses him off, and Izuku feels a hit of dread as Kacchan swipes forward with a kick.

Monoma laughs, dodging underneath Kacchan’s leg and giving him a firm shove in the back, his hands exploding as he does. Kacchan lands on his feet, whirling around to hit him, but Izuku can see that his left foot is outside of bounds, just barely over the edge of the tape.

“Bakugou is out of bounds!” Present Mic shouts, and Kacchan jerks in surprise on the field below, explosions crackling out of his palms. “Monoma wins!” Kacchan growls, loud enough that Izuku thinks he actually *hears* it over the crowd of the audience, but it could just be that he’s seen that look on Kacchan’s face enough times that he knows what noise he’d make. He leaps forward at Monoma, his palms sparking and blasting, but the explosions suddenly end. Izuku can see Aizawa, walking up behind Kacchan with his hair floating above his head. Kacchan goes for Monoma anyway, and Aizawa’s capture weapon shoots out to wrap around his arms, tugging him away.

“I can’t believe he *lost*,” Uraraka whispers, echoing Izuku’s thoughts. “What did Monoma say to him to get him so pissed off?”

“I can’t imagine it’s all that difficult to get that reaction out of Bakugou,” Iida comments, and when Izuku glances over, there’s a strange furrow to his brow. “I’m simply surprised that Monoma was able to get him out of bounds regardless of his emotional state.”

“I-I think we all underestimated Monoma,” Izuku says, swallowing. “I can’t believe...”

“You’re fighting him in the second round, aren’t you Deku?” Uraraka gives him a sympathetic look. “Do you think you’ll be okay?” Izuku shrugs, anxiety prickling under his skin. From a couple of rows down, Kaminari twists in his seat, looking up to face them.

“Oh, Midoriya will be fine!” He chirps, a grin on his face. “Didn’t you see how Monoma fought? He totally relied on Bakugou’s quirk. Against someone like Midoriya who’s all fighting skill and no quirk, he’s gonna get *smoked*!” Kaminari gives Izuku a thumbs up. “I’m gonna get popcorn to watch that fight.”

Izuku blinks. “I-I don’t know if I’m that good at fighting,” he says, uncurling his fingers where they’ve been tightly wrapped around the arms of his chair. “H-He looked pretty good at it...”

“Are you kidding?” Uraraka elbows him. “Deku, you’re one of the best in the class! I think only Ojiro and maybe Bakugou can compare, and they both have quirks to use.”

Izuku feels his face turn red, and he splutters to try and respond. “I-I’m not t-that good!” he says, twisting his hands together and looking down at his lap. “I-I just practice a lot...”

“You train as much as Bakugou studies, dude,” Kaminari chimes in. “I wish I had that kind of motivation! I’d be all buff and muscle-y.” He laughs, and Iida and Uraraka laugh along with him. After a moment, Izuku joins in, the words of his friends slowly uncoiling the tight anxiety in his chest.

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Izuku stands in the tunnel once again. It's becoming familiar, even though he's not on the same side of the field every time. The tunnels are identical, all smooth concrete walls over pressed dirt ground, and it's a constant with each of these fights. This time, he's on the one that has light spilling in from the angle of the afternoon sun. Izuku's standing with the tips of his shoes *just* inside of the shadow, the sunlight threatening to spill over and touch them.

"Nervous?" Aizawa's voice doesn't surprise Izuku. He's leaning on the side wall of the tunnel, where Izuku thinks he's been since he finished carting Kacchan away. Izuku wonders where Kacchan is now, if he's calmed down.

"A little," Izuku admits, kicking at the ground. The edge of his shoe hits the light. Izuku thinks about last time's second round, when he lost in moments. He's hopeful that this won't be like that.

Aizawa nods. "Try not to let him get under your skin," he says, and Izuku stops fiddling with his feet to properly look at him. "He's not that skilled in hand to hand, but he makes up for it by being clever. You'll be fine if you don't let him get in your head."

Izuku nods, pressing his lips together in determination. "I won't let him get to me," he promises, clenching his hands into fists at his sides. "If I beat him here..."

Aizawa nods. "You'll either be up against Todoroki or Kirishima for the semifinal." He glances over to the field. "It's time," he says, and when Izuku follows his gaze, he can see Monoma stepping out of his tunnel, into the bright light. His blue-grey eyes seem already fixed on Izuku, a lazy smile on his face becoming more visible as he gets closer.

Izuku turns, walking out onto the field himself. The bright light isn't as jarring this time, and he's not sure if it's from being used to it or if it's because he's in the other tunnel. Monoma's definitely grinning at him, a wide smirk that makes Izuku's stomach twitch with nerves. They step into the ring, facing each other.

"For the second match of the second round, we have Izuku Midoriya from class 1-A against Neito Monoma from class 1-B!" Present Mic's voice fills Izuku's ears, soothing him. He knows how this part goes.

"This is an interesting match up, given that Midoriya is quirkless and Monoma's quirk allows him to copy others' quirks! We'll be in for an entertaining fight for sure. Ready?" Izuku settles into a fighting stance. Just like in his match with Kacchan, Monoma doesn't shift, still standing normally with a confident smile.

"Start!" Izuku moves immediately, mirroring Kacchan's signature right hook. Monoma dodges it, easily, and Izuku twists with the motion, spinning around to hit Monoma in the side with a back kick that strikes him hard, the ball of Izuku's foot contacting him with force. Izuku grins when he sees Monoma wince, his smile faltering.

"Did you think I'd be an easy match up?" Izuku asks, sliding forward with an elbow strike that Monoma barely deflects, the palm of his hand sliding off of Izuku's uniform sleeve.

"On the contrary," Monoma hisses, moving in so he's closer to Izuku. "You're the worst possible match for me," he says, throwing up a knee that hits Izuku on the hip bone. The pain is bright and quick, but it's nothing compared to what Izuku has felt before. Izuku sees an opening, an unguarded spot on Monoma's stomach, and he quickly strikes out with a fist, hitting the other boy in the center of his stomach. Monoma groans, stumbling back to hold his stomach, and Izuku uses the greater distance to whip a leg out, smacking Monoma in the side of his head.

“I’m glad you’re aware of it,” Izuku says back to him before he can think better of it. Fighting makes him bold, he thinks as he steps back, letting Monoma be the one to move in next.

“Bold words,” Monoma says, rolling his eyes as he settles into a fighting stance. “Coming from a *quirkless* guy.” He grins, showing his teeth as he darts in, aiming a punch at Izuku’s face. Izuku blocks it with a forearm.

“I’m quirkless,” Izuku says, moving in to body slam Monoma, forcing him to step back or lose his balance. “And I’m still going to beat you.”

Monoma hums. “What if you’re not, though?” he asks, sidestepping out of the way of a kick Izuku throws at his chest.

“What?” Izuku asks, ducking forward and kneeing Monoma in the chest. Monoma gets a hand between his chest and Izuku’s knee, but Izuku still hears a pained grunt at the impact.

“What if you’re not quirkless?” Monoma says through gritted teeth. “Do you even have the extra toe joint?”

“I don’t,” Izuku replies, sliding back from Monoma. “Why do you care?”

Monoma shrugs, his fists still ready to try and block Izuku at any moment. “I can tell if someone has a quirk or not if I copy it. Wouldn’t you like to know for sure? Whether you’re actually quirkless or not?” He steps forward as he says it, throwing a kick that smacks Izuku in the side. Izuku hisses, sliding in to prevent him from being able to follow up with another kick.

“Because,” Monoma continues, even as he jerks his face out of the way of Izuku’s backhand. “If you have a quirk and you’re still like this, doesn’t that just mean you’re useless? That there’s no excuse for it, that you’re worthless and weak all on your own?”

Izuku growls and shoots forward, his elbow cracking along Monoma’s jaw with a satisfying sound. “Shut *up*,” he hisses as Monoma jerks back, a hand coming up to hold his jaw where it’s already bruising. “I don’t care.”

“You don’t?” Monoma asks, a strange light in his eyes. “Why, are you afraid to know the truth?” He steps forward, a hand outstretched like he’s going to try and touch Izuku. Izuku bares his teeth at him and slides in, grabbing Monoma by the front of his uniform, flipping him over his shoulder and onto the ground, over the edge of the white tape. Monoma hits against the ground with a pained expression on his face, and Izuku stares down at him as Present Mic announces his victory.

“I’m not afraid,” Izuku says. “It just doesn’t matter to me. I beat *you*, either way, so I guess I’m not really all that weak or useless.” Izuku steps back, turning away before Monoma can respond. He walks back into the tunnel as the crowd cheers around him.

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Izuku isn’t surprised to see Kacchan waiting for him when steps out of Recovery Girl’s office, the bruising on his knuckles and a shoulder muscle he hadn’t even noticed healed. He’s chewing on the fruit gummies she’d given him, telling him to rehydrate and rest up before his next match. He’s not even really tired, actually, and it’s kind of a strange feeling considering that for him, this was his fourth fight and not his second. This day has already stretched on so long for him, and he wonders if he adds up the hours, how long it really has been.

Kacchan is leaning against the wall across from the door as Izuku steps out, pushing the door closed behind him. It shuts with a soft click. His friend has changed into a tank top and shorts, still

wearing the uniform training shoes.

“Deku,” Kacchan says, his voice low but not quite angry, not yet. Izuku can see a bandage on his upper arm, where there must be a burn from his fight with Monoma. Izuku wonders if Kacchan had refused to have it be healed, or if Recovery Girl had chosen to spare his stamina.

“K-Kacchan,” Izuku replies, stuttering like he’s in middle school. He hates that he still does that, when he’s nervous or surprised.

“How the fuck did you beat him?” Kacchan asks, pushing himself off of the wall and stalking forward, toward Izuku. “How the fuck did you beat him when I couldn’t?”

Izuku blinks. “I-It was a bad matchup for him,” he explains, holding up his hands in a preemptive surrender as Kacchan gets closer to him. “Your quirk is so powerful, s-so it helped him beat you, but--”

“Did you use yours?” Kacchan demands, grabbing the front of Izuku’s uniform. “Did you use your secret fucking quirk to beat him?” Izuku brings a hand up, holding Kacchan’s wrist. His muscles are tense under the skin, and Izuku can feel his tendons, the bones of his wrist.

“I-I can’t use it in the middle of combat like that,” Izuku says, shaking his head. “It’s--It’s not something that would give me an advantage in that fight.” Kacchan’s eyes narrow, the red of his irises glinting like rubies in the light.

“You better not be fucking lying to me, Deku,” Kacchan growls, but it’s not the same as when he growled in middle school, not the same as the beginning of the year. “Or else I’ll kill you.”

Izuku can’t help himself, a snort of a laugh escaping him at that. He sees Kacchan’s face twist as he snarls.

“You don’t think I could fucking do it?” Kacchan hisses, and Izuku shakes his head, still trying not to laugh outright.

“No, no, it’s not that!” he answers, smiling despite himself. “It’s, um, it’s an inside joke,” he says, the excuse sounding weak even to him, but Kacchan sighs and releases his grip on Izuku’s shirt.

“You’re fucking weird, Deku,” he says as he turns and walks away, stomping slightly. Izuku shakes his head, still grinning at his internal joke as he follows.

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Izuku stands in the tunnel, once more. He can see Endeavor again, talking to Todoroki in the shade on the other side of the field. He doesn’t have to hear what they’re saying to know it’s nasty, judging by the way they gesture and what he remembers from the last time. It’s unreal to Izuku, that he’s made it to the semifinals at all, and something about it makes him feel odd, like he shouldn’t have made it this far. He can remember his complete defeat at Todoroki’s hands last time, and it makes him nervous, but he has a plan. It’s not pretty and it’s not polite, but Izuku thinks it just might work.

He steps out onto the field, not hesitating. Listening to the sounds of the audience as he and Todoroki approach each other, he traces his eyes over Todoroki’s face, over the furious set to his jaw and the glint of pain in his eyes. Izuku feels bad for what he’s planning, considering how upset Todoroki already looks.

“For the first match of the semifinals, we have two students from class 1-A! Izuku Midoriya, an

underdog who's blown away all of our expectations with his decisive victories in his first two matches, will be facing off against Shouto Todoroki, who has absolutely destroyed both of his opponents thus far!" Present Mic sounds excited for their fight. "I'm looking forward to seeing this one, personally!"

"Ready?" Izuku makes eye contact with Todoroki, then, in a move he's never practiced but has thought about for the past few minutes, blinks rapidly, rolling his eyes back and up.

"Start!" Present Mic calls, and Izuku lets himself drop to the ground, falling like he's just gone limp, forward. He hears an uproar from the audience as he hits the ground, hears Todoroki move forward.

"Midoriya?!" Izuku can hear that same panic in his voice that he did in the bathroom both of those times, and he feels guilty when he opens his eyes and reaches up, grabbing the front of Todoroki's sports uniform and yanking him into a punch to the gut.

"Sorry, Todoroki," Izuku says, watching surprise and pain flit across Todoroki's face. "But there was no way I was going to win without fighting dirty." Izuku hauls himself to his feet, throwing an elbow strike that collides with the edge of Todoroki's jaw.

Todoroki growls, low and angry and feral, and he swings at Izuku with his right fist, ice already gathering on his knuckles. Izuku slides forward, into Todoroki's chest. The punch just misses him, but Izuku can still feel the icy burn of the cold surrounding Todoroki's arm. Izuku wonders if pissing him off will just make things worse for him, but quickly dismisses the idea. *He's already mad*, Izuku thinks as he slides in, keeping close to Todoroki even as the other student tries to back away. *His dad did that for me.*

When Todoroki tries to step back again, Izuku grabs onto the front of his uniform shirt and pulls himself in so they're almost touching. It earns him an icy punch to the shoulder, but it's worth it when Izuku raises a knee up sharply, hitting Todoroki square in the crotch. He doesn't release him though, keeping close.

"Can't do that big wall of ice on me if I'm this close, can you?" Izuku asks as he tips his head back, then slams his forehead into Todoroki's face. Their height difference means that the bone of his forehead hits right on Todoroki's nose, and Izuku can both feel and smell the wave of iron-hot blood that pours out from Todoroki's nose. Todoroki grunts, smashing a fist directly into Izuku's face. Izuku's nose crunches, sickening and gross, and Izuku squints his eyes against the sharp pain as his nose starts bleeding.

Todoroki raises his right hand, and Izuku recognizes the movement of the air that means he's about to use his quirk. Izuku grits his teeth and reaches out, grabbing onto Todoroki's outstretched arm just as a wave of sharp ice flows out from it, slicing the flesh on Izuku's legs and slamming into him with bruising force. Izuku grits his teeth.

"Trying to drag the match out?" Todoroki asks, glaring at him behind his mismatched bangs. "You're not going to last long like that." He swings his right hand again, and Izuku rushes forward once more, tackling into Todoroki's chest with the full force of his weight. Todoroki grunts underneath him but doesn't fall, ice cracking around them. Izuku can feel himself shivering, but he thinks Todoroki might be shivering, too.

"You're shivering," Izuku says, wrapping his fists in the fabric of Todoroki's uniform and leaning forward to sink his teeth into Todoroki's shoulder, into the meat of where his neck meets his shoulder. Todoroki hisses, kicking at him and trying to pull him off, but Izuku digs his teeth in harder. Todoroki reels back, punching Izuku in the cheekbone with a hand that's coated in ice, and

Izuku is thrown off of Todoroki, onto the ground.

Izuku looks up at him, spitting out a piece of fabric he'd ripped off with his teeth. Todoroki stalks toward him, a grimace on his face.

"I'm sorry about all of this," Todoroki says, stretching out his right hand. "But I have to give you credit. I don't think anyone expected you to last this long." He waves his hand, summoning a thick ice wall, but Izuku knows what to expect. He crouches down, like he's about to jump, just as the ice crystallized around him. It's thinner, weaker than that first attack last time through, and Izuku hopes it's because he's started to tire Todoroki out and not because Todoroki is taking pity on him.

"If you're so impressed by me," Izuku grunts, tensing his muscles and ripping himself free from the ice. It cuts into his thighs, bruises against his shoulders, and rips skin and fabric off of his back in a sunburst of pain that makes Izuku see stars in his vision. "Then take me *seriously* !" He shouts, stumbling out of the ice and seeing Todoroki's wide eyes, his surprised stare. "Stop holding back!"

Todoroki grits his teeth, raising his hand again, but Izuku charges at him, throwing himself into Todoroki. He ignores the way Todoroki's knee hits him in the arm, instead reaching to grab a handful of white hair, yanking on it. Todoroki grits his teeth, and Izuku feels the sharp pain of a punch to his ribs that makes him cough, sputtering. He looks down at the ground for just a second, and he sees blood there. *I'm bleeding more than I'd expected*, he thinks as he looks up, yanking Todoroki's head forward by his hair and kneeing him in the gut. There's not a lot of momentum behind it, and Todoroki barely flinches.

"I'm *not*," Todoroki hisses, and that makes Izuku growl, loud and angry.

"You *are*! Use your fire and stop playing around!" Izuku smashes his head forward into Todoroki's once again, his skull colliding with Todoroki's already broken nose. "I might be weaker than you, but at least I'm taking this seriously!" Izuku hisses, letting go of Todoroki's hair and dropping his hand, reaching for Todoroki's neck. Todoroki bats his hand away, anger burning in his eyes.

"What makes you think this isn't *serious* for me?" Todoroki yells back at him, shooting a wave of ice that completely coats Izuku's left arm. Izuku can't bend his wrist or elbow, and the arm is nothing but a solid burning pain, but Izuku swings his arm like a club anyway, smashing the side of the frozen thing into Todoroki's head.

"Because if you took this seriously," Izuku says, panting, "I'd have lost already!" He shouts, shoving at Todoroki. This close, none of his hits have the power he really wants them to have, and he keeps getting hurt, but it's worth it for the look that spreads across Todoroki's face.

"Fine," Todoroki says, his left side erupting in flame. "I'll give you what you want," he hisses, and all Izuku sees before he loses consciousness is a wall of bright, orange fire.

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Izuku opens his eyes to a room with a white ceiling, neat tiles that repeat over and over again. He blinks in the light, pulling himself up into a sitting position and hissing when his head aches.

Across from him, sitting in matching chairs. Uraraka and Tsuyu both startle, Uraraka almost jumping out of her chair. They're in the infirmary wing of the arena, Izuku realizes, blinking. He looks down at himself, sees numerous white bandages wrapped over angry red burns and purpling bruises.

“Deku!” Uraraka says, leaning forward. “How are you feeling?”

Izuku blinks. “N-Not that bad, actually...” He’s surprised by it, but he’s also exhausted. *Recovery Girl must have already healed me*, he realizes, glancing around.

“Your match against Todoroki ended about twenty minutes ago, ribbit,” Tsuyu says, like she can tell what he’s thinking. “Recovery Girl said you could watch the finals, if you were feeling up to it.” Izuku nods, swinging his legs over the side of the bed and moving the blanket off of himself. He’s still in his sports uniform, he notes, but he may as well not be for the damage the outfit has taken. It’s in shreds on his arms and legs, and probably on his back, too.

“She said you need to come back right after, though,” Uraraka says, a worried tone to her voice. “You’re pretty banged up...”

Izuku nods. “I can tell,” he says, wincing as he stands up. Uraraka stands up, too, her chair squealing against the floor as it’s moved back by the motion. She holds her hands out, like she expects him to fall. Izuku doesn’t, although he notes absently that he feels detached from his body, from the whole situation. It’s a lot like when he lost last time, really.

“I’m going to go call my mom,” he says, pushing past Uraraka and Tsuyu and walking towards the door.

“W-Wait, Deku--” Uraraka puts a hand on his shoulder. “Are you okay?”

Izuku nods. “I’m just kind of out of it,” he admits, giving her a small smile. “I’ll be okay. Meet you in the stands?”

Uraraka nods, smiling. “Okay! Text me if you need help with anything, okay?” Izuku nods at her, and he turns and leaves, this time without being stopped.

It’s easy to slip into the janitor’s closet again. It’s easy to slit his wrists. He thinks bleeding out goes faster, too. As he waits, once again in the dark and the quiet, he wonders if he’ll wake up with just a headache or if it’ll be worse.

Either way, he thinks, *this is my last chance*.

Chapter End Notes

cw: dissociation and i think that's it

thank you for reading (as always!)! i really appreciate all of the support and feedback you guys give me, it means the world!!!

come by our discord server if u dare ;) it's very fun and everyone is super sweet:
<https://discord.gg/Vqaj62ceCt>

btw, next chapter **should** be the last sports festival chapter! depending on how long it is, it may have to get split into two chapters tho lol

sports festival, part 6

Chapter Summary

last time: izuku got todoroki to use his fire and then killed himself again lmao

Chapter Notes

HEY GUYS!!! double update bc i have no self control. this arc will probably be 3 more chaps actually, including this one tho! i know a lot of ppl were confused as to why izuku reset, but i think it'll become more clear as the arc wraps up djfkgkdfj

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Izuku opens his eyes to a wave of nausea that makes him drop his spoon, just like last time. He slaps a hand over his mouth, quickly standing up from his seat in the mess hall. He can see everyone looking at him, but it's taking everything in him not to throw up right here, right now, so he ignores Uraraka shouting after him as he stands up quickly, knocking over his chair as he turns and runs from the building.

He gets outside just in time to lean over into a bush, vomiting his just-eaten food into a bush beside the entrance to the mess hall. He gags on the taste, wrapping his hands around his stomach and squeezing his eyes shut as he retches, his stomach aching and burning. His head throbs, too, and Izuku peels one eye open to look at the vomit on the grass and leaves in front of him, relieved when he doesn't see any blood.

"Midoriya?" Aizawa's voice isn't a surprise to Izuku, and Izuku looks up, wincing as his head protests the movement. Aizawa is walking to stand beside him, a concerned look on his face as he stretches out a hand to feel Izuku's forehead.

"You're running a fever," Aizawa says, his lips twitching into a slight frown. "How long have you been feeling sick?" Izuku shakes his head, opening his mouth to reply. He's interrupted by Uraraka's voice as she comes running out of the mess hall and over to him.

"Deku, what happened?" She blinks, clearly taking in the scene. Izuku gives her a weak smile. "Oh no, are you sick?"

Izuku shakes his head. "I-I think I'm just nervous," he replies.

"Uraraka, go inside and get him some napkins and a bottle of water," Aizawa orders, and Uraraka nods, running back into the mess hall. Aizawa sighs, looking Izuku over.

"Do you usually get nauseous like this when you're nervous?" Aizawa asks, placing a hand on Izuku's upper arm and carefully tugging him away from the bush and across the path to the other side of the building. Izuku lets him drag him over to the wall, and Izuku leans against it gratefully. His head is starting to feel a little better, but his stomach feels like a rock in his gut, a point of pain that pulses with his heart beating.

“Sometimes,” Izuku answers, taking a deep breath. He hears footsteps.

“Here,” Uraraka says, softly. “Deku, how are you feeling?”

Izuku hums. “Better, I think.” He blinks his eyes open when he feels the scratchy surface of a napkin wipe along his jaw. He sees Aizawa, wiping his face clean with an impassive expression, one Izuku can’t read.

He pulls back, tossing the napkin in a nearby garbage can that flanks the door to the mess hall, then takes another napkin and pours a small amount of water on it. Izuku lets him set a gentle hand on Izuku’s cheek, turning his face up slightly so that Aizawa can wipe his face with the cool, clean napkin. Izuku swallows, shutting his eyes for just a second. He feels like a child, but he doesn’t protest. Aizawa pulls back, and Izuku opens his eyes again.

“Drink,” Aizawa orders, passing Izuku the opened bottle of water. Izuku complies, sipping at the water. It soothes his throat where it feels raspy and raw, and it feels cool and nice in his stomach. Izuku sighs, pulling the bottle away from his lips when it’s about half empty. Aizawa is staring at him, an assessing look on his face, and Izuku can see Uraraka hovering anxiously behind him.

“I feel better,” he says, and it’s not a complete lie. He can feel that pounding headache and the sharp stomach ache, still, but he doesn’t feel like he did on that final try at the USJ. He thinks he could fight, even, as long as he pushes the pain aside.

“Do you think it’s a good idea for you to continue on in today’s events?” Aizawa asks, making eye contact with him. “I’m trusting you to be honest with me here. If you don’t think you can safely participate, nobody will think poorly of you.”

Izuku shakes his head. “I’m going to participate,” he says firmly, meeting Aizawa’s gaze. “I’m going to fight, and I’m going to do well.” He isn’t going to lose, not to Todoroki. He can’t lose to him, not with how hard he’s worked. *I can’t be satisfied just making him use his fire because he’s angry*, he thinks, the thought he’d had since their last match. *I need to beat him.*

Aizawa tips his head slightly. “You’re awfully confident,” he says, reaching into his pocket and holding out a brightly colored packet with a spout on the top. “Here. It’ll give you energy, but shouldn’t upset your stomach.”

“T-Thanks,” Izuku says, blinking and taking the jelly pouch. He looks back up at his teacher. “Have the matches been announced yet?”

“They have,” Uraraka says from behind Aizawa. “Are you sure it’s a good idea for you to fight, though? You just threw up...”

“I’m okay,” Izuku says, smiling at her. “Let me see the bracket,” he says, and Aizawa steps aside so that Uraraka can show him her phone. Izuku blinks, then smiles.

“I’m against Shinsou first,” Izuku says, meeting her eyes.

“Isn’t that the kid with the purple hair you teamed up with last round?” She tips her head slightly, and Izuku nods. He sees Aizawa’s face shift slightly from where he’s still watching Izuku, and Izuku looks over at him.

“Sensei, I don’t think I’ll need to fight dirty to win the first round,” Izuku says., twisting open the jelly pouch and smiling. “But I won’t hesitate to if I need to.”

Aizawa raises an eyebrow at him. “Okay.” He narrows his eyes slightly at Izuku, but Izuku just

pops the opening of the jelly pouch in his mouth and slurps loudly at him, still smiling. His stomach hurts and so does his head, but he thinks he can do it, this time. He has to.

--

Izuku feels kind of bad when he steps into the ring with Shinsou, because he's pretty sure that in one of the earlier rounds, Shinsou had actually made it to the semifinals. To be fair, Izuku is having a hard time remembering, what with how many fights he's heard about at this point. It's as bright as always on the field, and the light stings Izuku's eyes slightly, worsening his headache. He swallows, the lingering taste of strawberry jelly in his mouth.

"For this match, we have two teammates from the cavalry battle! It's Hitoshi Shinsou of general studies up against Izuku Midoriya of the hero course's class 1-A! This is sure to be an interesting match to watch, considering these two were part of the surprise third place steal last round." Present Mic laughs, and Izuku sighs internally. *It won't be interesting*, Izuku thinks, *because I'm the worst possible match-up for Shinsou right now.*

"I knew I shouldn't have worked with you," Shinsou says, venom in his voice. "You were deadweight in the cavalry battle, anyway." Izuku doesn't reply, just takes a deep breath.

"Ready?" Present Mic, same as always, calls for them to prepare. Izuku settles into a fighting stance, and Shinsou crosses his arms over his chest.

"Start!" Present Mic calls, and Izuku ducks forward, aiming a punch at Shinsou's chest. It contacts strongly, striking Shinsou hard and causing him to grimace.

"Is that how this is going to go?" Shinsou asks, stepping into a poor copy of Izuku's stance. "You're going to pretend you haven't taken advantage of me? That you didn't team up with me just to learn how my quirk works to screw me over later?" Shinsou throws a punch of his own at Izuku, but compared to training with Aizawa, it's laughably slow. Izuku ducks under it, using the opening to hit Shinsou with an elbow to the ribs.

"God, I'm going to lose to a fucking quirkless person, aren't I?" Shinsou says, voice strained as he moves away from Izuku. "What an embarrassment. I don't think they should allow people with your *condition* to compete at all. It's not like you'll be able to be a hero."

Izuku bites down on his tongue, stopping himself from replying because even though he *knows* Shinsou is just trying to get on his nerves, it still *hurts*. Izuku steps back for a second, sliding forward to throw a kick that makes Shinsou lose his balance. He's smart enough to step to the side instead of back, at least, avoiding stepping over the tape.

"Why do *you* get to be in the hero course?" Shinsou spits, stepping forward and punching at Izuku's face. "Why are you so special? You're *quirkless*!" Izuku dodges the punch, grimacing at the look on Shinsou's face.

"What is it that makes it so you get this?" Shinsou gestures at him, a desperate look on his face. "What's so fucking special about you? Why are you so important? I don't *get* it. Even the stupid monkey and the glittery guy teamed up with you, and for what?" Izuku knees Shinsou in the gut for that one, and he doesn't feel that bad when he hears Shinsou gag on impact.

"Why do they care about you?" Shinsou asks, panting. Izuku can hear the *pain* in Shinsou's voice, and it breaks his heart. *I need to end this*, he thinks, grabbing ahold of Shinsou's shirt and flipping him over a shoulder, just like he did with Monoma. It's easier, with Shinsou. Izuku winces in sympathy as Shinsou strikes the ground, out of bounds.

“Shinsou is out of the ring!” Present Mic shouts. “Midoriya wins!” The crowd erupts in cheers. Izuku takes a deep, steady breath, then offers a hand to Shinsou.

“It’s not me,” he answers, his hand steady even as Shinsou’s breath hitches sharply. “They’re the ones who are special. They’re nice to me because they’re just that good.” Shinsou snorts, slapping his hand away and sitting up, looking away from him.

“Then why you?” he asks, so quietly that Izuku doesn’t think he’s supposed to hear. “Why you and not me?” Izuku swallows the lump rising in his throat, trying to find the words to say to Shinsou as he stands and stalks towards his tunnel, shoulders hunched. Izuku stares after him, feeling lost.

“Midoriya.” Izuku turns to see Aizawa waiting for him, hands in his pockets. “How are you feeling?” He jerks his head to the tunnel, then starts to walk. Izuku follows him.

“F-Fine,” Izuku replies. He watches his teacher’s back. “Sensei, Shinsou, he--”

“I know,” Aizawa replies. “The entrance exam is highly illogical,” he says as they step into the shadow of the tunnel. “It results in a number of students with high potential being overlooked. Shinsou is one of those cases.”

“It’s not fair,” Izuku mutters, kicking at the ground. “He’s right. He deserves to be in the hero course more than I do.”

“I wouldn’t say that,” Aizawa says, opening the door into the building and holding it open for Izuku, looking back at him with an arched brow. “It’s certainly unfair, but the practical exam was also biased against you,” he says as Izuku steps through the door into the cool air-conditioned hallway. “You earned your place in class 1-A.” Izuku stops in the hall, watching as Aizawa walks in after him.

“That doesn’t help Shinsou any, though...” Izuku says, twisting his hands together. “I just--It’s not right.”

Aizawa blinks, slow and even. “It isn’t. But general studies students can transfer into the heroics course, if they make a good enough impression during the sports festival,” he says, tilting his head slightly to the side. “Shinsou has, at the very least, caught my attention.”

Izuku blinks. “He’s going to be in our class?” he asks, a smile tugging at his lips. Aizawa sighs, turning and continuing down the hallway.

“That’s not what I said. You need to eat something before your next match.” he says, and Izuku scrambles after him. “You’ll be up against Yaoyorozu.”

--

The tunnel is quiet, this time, and Izuku is alone with his thoughts. Aizawa had pushed another jelly pouch and a bottle of water at him before disappearing, and Izuku’s pretty sure he went to talk to Shinsou, judging by their conversation from before. Izuku’s stomach has settled a bit, and he doesn’t feel like he might throw up, but he can still feel it like a rock in his belly. His head is aching, too, but only when he moves. All things considered, it’s something he can handle.

His stomach doesn’t hurt as badly as his skin has before, when he was in middle school and Kacchan had burned him. His head doesn’t ache quite as badly as it did when he got a concussion as Ace, fighting on the streets. He clenches his hands into fists. *This is a battle I can win*, he thinks to himself, staring out onto the field. *This is something I have to win, if I want to beat Todoroki.*

He steps out into the field, the familiar sounds of the audience's chatter as he steps into the ring. Yaoyorozu steps out of her tunnel just as he steps into place, and she looks nervous as she takes her place, facing him.

"Good luck, Midoriya," she whispers, smiling faintly at him. Izuku returns the grin.

"You too, Yaoyorozu," he replies, and she nods.

"For our next match," Present Mic says, just like always, "We have two students from class 1-A! Izuku Midoriya will be facing off against Momo Yaoyorozu. These two both did exceedingly well in their first matches, so I'm excited to see them face off against each other. Ready?" Izuku slides into his familiar fighting stance, and across from him, Yaoyorozu does the same.

"Start!" Present Mic shouts, and Izuku slides forward before Yaoyorozu has a chance to use her quirk. *This might be the only chance I get*, he thinks as he swings forward a strong knee strike that Yaoyorozu barely manages to block before she jumps back, running to the side as her quirk sparks and ripples along her arm as she starts to pull out a long metal rod. Izuku grits his teeth and pivots on his foot, spinning his leg around to sweep at her feet as she moves. She stumbles for a second, catching herself with her newly made staff just as Izuku lurches forward and punches her in the jaw.

"Sorry," he grits out between his teeth as she swings down, her staff contacting his forearms with a painful clang as he blocks the shot. The metal is hard and solid, not hollow, and Izuku notes that it's got to be heavy. Yaoyorozu turns it, swinging at Izuku's legs, and Izuku realizes she's not trained to fight with it, not like some of the people he's seen on the internet are. Izuku easily slides out of the way of her low strike.

Izuku twists, launching a kick that hits right where Yaoyorozu's right hand is on the staff, where her fingers wrap around the metal. The force of it is enough that it stings Izuku's foot even through his shoe, and he winces in sympathy as Yaoyorozu yelps, stepping back and dropping the staff. Izuku can see that her right hand is red and her middle and index fingers are bent strangely, and he grimaces, stepping back for a second. She doesn't wait, though, reaching with her left arm to pull something out of her arm, a long, thin blade with a grippy handle. Izuku grins.

"A knife?" He asks as she holds it up, leveling it at him.

"A knife," she confirms, moving into a fighting stance. Izuku copies her, his eyes darting to the staff on the ground. She must catch his gaze, though, because she kicks it, sending it skittering out of bounds before he can even plan his move to grab it.

"Smart," he says, giving her a smile, and she returns it before stepping forward at him, swiping the knife through the air. Izuku leans back, out of her range, then slides in as she moves her hand back. He whips a back fist out, hitting the inside of her wrist, and the knife goes clattering to the ground.

He moves quicker, this time, twisting out of the way of Yaoyorozu's kick as he rolls on his shoulder, grabbing the knife as he somersaults across the ring. He hops to his feet with the knife in hand, glancing at the tape just behind him. He moves forward, just as Yaoyorozu pulls another, longer knife from her arm, holding it up and gritting her teeth at him. Izuku steps back, into the range he's trained at, but it doesn't seem Yaoyorozu has the same training, because she steps forward before she swipes at him.

Izuku sees the swipe coming, and it's weeks of training with Aizawa that move his arm, his knife hand darting forward to slice along the back of Yaoyorozu's hand before he can think about it. She drops the knife, a spray of blood coming from her hand, but the worst part is the way she screams,

reeling back and holding her bleeding hand with her broken one. Izuku steps back, his eyes wide and hands shaking as he watches her cradle her hand. He can see the bones in the back of her hand through the cut, can see the way her flesh hangs off of her skin. The audience murmurs around them.

“I-I...” Yaoyorozu swallows visibly, tears rolling down her cheeks. “I give up,” she sobs, and Izuku drops his knife, stepping toward her. She flinches back as he reaches out, and Izuku jerks back.

“I-I’m sorry,” Izuku says, but Yaoyorozu turns away from him. Aizawa comes from behind her, setting a hand on her shoulder and leading her toward the tunnel she came from. He gives Izuku a meaningful glance, and Izuku blinks before following after them.

Yaoyorozu doesn’t say anything, just stares at her hand as Aizawa leads her into the shade of the tunnel. Izuku can hear his own heart beating, hard and fast in his throat as he follows them. Aizawa glances back at him every so often, so Izuku knows that he knows he’s following, but his teacher doesn’t say anything. Izuku darts forward when they get to the door, pushing it open for them and stepping inside to hold it open. As Yaoyorozu steps forward into the light of the hallway, she looks at him, blinking tears out of her eyes.

“It’s okay, Midoriya,” she says, hiccuping. “It’s my fault for underestimating you.”

Izuku shakes his head. “I went too far,” he says, following them again as Aizawa grabs Yaoyorozu’s shoulder and steers her along, towards where Izuku knows the infirmary is.

Recovery Girl opens the door for them when they get there, holding it open for them with a grim look on her face. Izuku watches the way her gaze sticks to Yaoyorozu’s hand as they walk in, just like Izuku’s gaze keeps sticking on the trail of blood going down the hallway. *I did that*, he thinks as they walk into the infirmary.

“You two, wait out here,” Recovery Girl orders before ushering Yaoyorozu into a room and shutting the door behind them. Izuku feels like things are moving more quickly than they should, like his brain is skipping beats. He covers his mouth with a hand as a wave of nausea rises in his throat, and he barely makes it to the tiny trash can by the door before he’s throwing up again, knees on the hard tile as he retches. He hears Aizawa sigh above him.

“Are you still feeling sick, or is this from what just happened?” Aizawa asks, and when Izuku looks up to him, he’s holding out a handful of tissues. Izuku takes them, wiping his face clean.

“Both,” Izuku says, grimacing at the taste in his mouth with he drops the tissues into the garbage can. “What if she--”

“Don’t,” Aizawa cuts him off. “There’s no point in wondering until we know. You did exactly what someone should in a knife fight. These tournaments are *dangerous*. Everyone knows that. You knowing how to use a knife isn’t any different from others having quirks.” Aizawa meets Izuku’s gaze as he straightens up.

“I know,” Izuku sighs. “But if I hurt her for real, I...” He shakes his head, biting his lip. *I’ll have to reset, if that happens*, he thinks, *but I don’t think I’ll be able to keep going. I don’t think I can compete if I reset again. But I can’t do that to her, not just so that I can win... I can’t be the reason someone else can’t fight.*

“Midoriya,” Aizawa says sharply, and Izuku looks up at him. “Stop thinking about it.” He grabs the sleeve of Izuku’s uniform and drags him the short distance to a row of chairs against the wall, tugging him down until he sits. Aizawa sits in the chair next to him, and Izuku forces himself to

take a deep breath as he grips onto his knees, digging his fingers into his flesh. He can see the way his knuckles go white, can feel the pain in his knees from it. Aizawa swats at his hands, not touching them but coming close.

“Stop that,” he orders, and Izuku relaxes his fingers, instead clenching his hands into fists. He can feel Aizawa’s gaze on the back of his neck, prickling his skin. Izuku thinks he might throw up again.

The door Yaoyorozu and Recovery Girl went through opens with a soft click, and Izuku whips his head up to see Recovery Girl peeking out, an unreadable expression on her face.

“You two can come in,” she says. “She wants to talk to you, Midoriya.” Recovery Girl opens the door further, stepping out of the doorway and walking to her desk, her cane clacking on the tile. She stops, glancing over at Izuku.

“Oh, and before you go, I want to look you over,” she says, settling into her chair. “Don’t think I didn’t notice you throwing up, young man.” Izuku nods, his face flushing slightly, and he stands up at the same time as Aizawa. Izuku wants to push past him, to get to the door first, but Aizawa is in his way, walking slow and calm to the door. Izuku follows, and he can’t even see Yaoyorozu around his teacher for a second. He wants to scream.

“Midoriya?” Yaoyorozu says as Izuku finally, finally sees her, and he holds his breath, gaze catching on her hands. The one that had been broken is tinted yellow with half-healed bruising, and the other is swathed in white bandages, resting on an ice pack on her lap. Yaoyorozu looks tired, her hair coming loose from her ponytail in places, but she smiles at him.

“A-Are you,” Izuku swallows. “Is your hand okay? I-I’m so sorry, Yao--”

“It’s completely fine,” she says, tipping her head slightly to the side and smiling. “Recovery Girl chewed me out for making a knife when I didn’t know whether or not my opponent was proficient in them, but other than my pride, I’m completely okay.” She looks down at her lap. “I really should be apologizing to you,” she says, and Izuku blinks.

“Why?” he asks, shaking his head. “I-I hurt you,” he says, gesturing to her hand. She meets his gaze, face turning serious.

“I didn’t take that fight as seriously as you did,” she says, staring into his eyes. “It was both irresponsible of me and rude to you.” She holds up her bandaged hand. “You’re going to be an amazing hero, Midoriya. We were fighting, and when you hurt me, your first instinct was to make sure I was okay.” She looks at him, a determined smile on her face. “You are an inspiration for me to work harder, Midoriya.”

Izuku blinks, his gaze dropping to her hand. “You’re really okay?” He asks, voice small. She nods, smiling still.

“I’m really okay,” she says, and Izuku breathes a sigh of relief.

“That was very mature of you,” Aizawa says, and Izuku sees him nod to Yaoyorozu. “Recovery Girl was right, by the way. You should always be cognizant of the fact that anything you make can be used by your opponent.”

Yaoyorozu nods, looking sheepish. “I know, it was stupid of me.”

“Midoriya,” Aizawa says, looking to him. Izuku jumps a little, looking up at him.

“Y-Yes?” He chirps, hating the way his voice breaks a little.

“You did good, and Yaoyorozu is fine. She’s told you she’s fine. Stop beating yourself up over it.” Aizawa reaches out, setting a hand on the top of Izuku’s head. “Got it?”

Izuku nods. “G-Got it!” he replies, face turning red. Yaoyorozu giggles, her laugh barely concealed behind her hand, and Izuku finds himself glad that he doesn’t have to reset and lose this moment.

Chapter End Notes

CW: vomiting, implied canon child abuse

THANK YOU FOR READING!!! and thank you all SO much for the support it means the world to me!!

discord link for yall: <https://discord.gg/Vqaj62ceCt>

sports festival, part 7

Chapter Summary

last time: izuku defeats shinsou and yaomomo in the first two rounds of the tournament

Chapter Notes

HEYO!! im excited for this chapter and the next one! next chapter will for sure be the last one of this arc, and then it's onto the next! i know some of you have been frustrated with either me or izuku during this arc, and i just hope it's a good sort of frustration!! i know that sometimes i write stuff that's a little stupid, and i apologize if it takes away from the story!!

enjoy <3

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Izuku stands in the tunnel, waiting for his fight with Todoroki for the third time. It's strange, being here, and knowing what only he knows. Knowing which buttons he can press to piss Todoroki off and make him use his fire, but not what to say to *help* him, not what to do to *win*. It's nice, though, not having to go through another fight in order to face Todoroki. Izuku doesn't know if he'd make it through the semifinals if it wasn't Todoroki; he thinks he's been lucky to survive this far.

Izuku isn't sure if he's surprised or not, when Endeavor steps into his tunnel this time, instead of Todoroki's. The man is bright like a torch, even more so up close, and it takes a lot of Izuku's energy to not make a rude face at him as he walks up to Izuku. The crackling of his fire is loud in the relative quiet of the tunnel.

"Midoriya, right?" Endeavor asks, his voice low and rough. "I must say, I found your performance in your last fight quite impressive." It's painful to look at him, with how bright his fire is burning.

"T-Thank you," Izuku replies, looking down at the dirt below him instead. The shadows warp strangely in the flickering light.

"I have something to ask you," Endeavor says. "How do you expect to become a hero, quirkless like you are?" Izuku's head shoots up, and he searches Endeavor's face for malice, for a mocking look or a twist of disdain, but there's just disbelief. Confusion. Like Endeavor doesn't mean to be rude, like he just simply can't fathom the idea of Izuku, quirkless, being a hero.

"I don't *expect* to," Izuku replies, meeting Endeavor's teal gaze. "I just will. There's no other future for me," he says, watching Endeavor's face twitch. "I'm going to be a hero, or I'll die trying." His lips quirk up at the end, into a bitter smile, because he *has*, already.

"Hmm," Endeavor grunts. "I wish my son took this as seriously as you did."

Izuku feels his face twitch. “What do you mean?” he asks, before he can talk himself out of it.

“Shouto doesn’t take his role seriously. If he’s going to be number one, then he needs to--” Endeavor starts to say, but Izuku cuts him off.

“He takes this more seriously than you think, Endeavor.” Izuku grits his teeth, blenching his hands into fists at his sides. “And with all due respect, if your son gets to be number one, it’s not *your* accomplishment. It’s *his* .”

“If Shouto wins, it will be because of my training,” Endeavor says, his brows twitching in anger. He opens his mouth again, but Izuku starts speaking.

“If he wins, it will be *despite* you,” Izuku growls, “not because of you. Now, if you’ll excuse me, I have a fight to win.” Izuku turns on his heels, walking out into the sunlight before he has a chance to process what he just said.

Todoroki looks angry, still, when he walks out into the sun, and Izuku can tell from the angle of his eyes that he’s looking behind Izuku, to where Endeavor must still be lurking.

“Don’t look at him,” Izuku growls, and Todoroki’s eyes snap to his, anger still on his face, mixing with confusion. “You’re fighting *me* .”

Todoroki tilts his head slightly, lips thinning into a frown. “What did he say to you?” he asks, voice low.

“For the first match of the semifinals, we have two class 1-A hero course students,” Present Mic says in the background. Izuku ignores him.

“Nothing important,” Izuku replies, keeping his eyes on Todoroki’s.

“Shouto Todoroki and Izuku Midoriya will be facing off for a spot in the finals. I’m sure you’re all familiar with these two by now, so I’ll skip the introductions,” Izuku knows what’s coming next. It’s not hard for him to focus on the pain in his stomach for a moment, and he feels himself grow pale. He makes a show of blinking rapidly, reaching a hand up to rest on his forehead. He sees Todoroki blink in surprise.

“Ready?” Izuku flutters his eyes, rolling them back in his head.

“Start!” Izuku drops to his knees, then to the ground, and he hears that same gasp from the audience, the grit of the ground under Todoroki’s sneaker.

“Midoriya?!” he shouts, and Izuku can tell he’s right there. Izuku opens his eyes, grabbing the front of Todoroki’s shirt and pulling him in, his face centimeters from Izuku’s.

“Sorry, Todoroki,” Izuku says, punching him in the gut. Todoroki hisses, his breath hitting Izuku’s face. “We both know I don’t stand a chance against you in a fair fight.” Todoroki pulls back as much as Izuku lets him, his lips turned in a snarl.

“Did he pay you to do this?” Todoroki spits, anger flashing through his features.

“Are you kidding me?” Izuku asks, pulling himself to his feet using his grip on Todoroki’s uniform front. “All he did was piss me off,” he says, cocking his shoulder back for a second before throwing an elbow strike that Todoroki dodges. It breaks Izuku’s grip on Todoroki’s shirt, and Todoroki tries to slide back, but Izuku keeps close. He dodges the punch Todoroki tries to aim at his stomach. *I’m used to his fighting style* , Izuku realizes as he blocks a knee strike. *This is easier*

than last time .

Todoroki growls, and Izuku feels the creep of ice up his left arm as he tackles Todoroki, throwing them both to the ground and out of the way of the wall of ice that grows and swells behind them. Todoroki is under Izuku for just a second, and Izuku takes advantage of it, punching Todoroki in the face as he pushes Izuku off of him. Izuku lands awkwardly on the ground, but he has a moment to gather himself as Todoroki winces, a hand coming to his nose. *I guess it's inevitable that he ends up with a bloody nose* , Izuku thinks as he lurches to his feet. Todoroki stands up across from him, a dangerous glint in his eye.

Todoroki raises his right hand, a swath of blue ice rippling across the field. Izuku grits his teeth, jumping into the air as the ground under his feet freezes into ice spikes, and he lands awkwardly, the ice still growing around him. He can feel his ankle roll, can feel the ice slicing the skin around his ankles, but he ignores the pain, trying to yank his feet free. They're embedded, though, and Izuku bites his lip.

"You talk a big game," Todoroki says, walking toward him with his right hand still outstretched, frost gathered on his fingertips. "But you don't actually stand a chance against me. It's impressive you've lasted as long as you have." Izuku grits his teeth, pulling his injured foot out of his shoe and out of the ice. He steps onto the jagged, icy ground, ignoring the discomfort, and rips his other foot out of its shoe.

"Want to bet?" Izuku says, settling into a fighting stance in his bare feet. Todoroki watches him, face impassive. A trickle of blood runs from his nose, gathering on his lip. "You're the one bleeding, Todoroki." Izuku grins as Todoroki's eyes narrow, and Izuku darts forward as Todoroki starts to use his quirk again, ice gathering on the ground as Izuku runs. The ice pulls the skin off from the bottoms of his feet, but he runs anyway. He throws a punch at Todoroki's face, one that the other boy easily blocks, but Izuku doesn't stop, knocking his head forward into Todoroki's nose, just like last time. He hears Todoroki's breath hitch in surprise and pain, and Izuku reels back just enough to meet Todoroki's eyes.

"I'm giving this everything I've got. Why aren't you?" He asks, and he knows he doesn't need to elaborate. Todoroki's eyes narrow into a glare as he steps back, moving away from Izuku. Izuku lets him.

"I'm going to win without using his quirk," Todoroki says, raising his hand and summoning a mass of ice that charges at Izuku, fast. "By rising to the top without using it, I'll have denied him everything."

Izuku growls, dodging to the side and ignoring the way a spike of ice slashes into his side, hot blood flowing from the wound as he runs at Todoroki again. Todoroki looks surprised, almost, and Izuku can see the shivers running up his arms. *It's time* , he thinks. *I might lose again, but it's time* .

"You're not your father!" Izuku screams, throat raw. Todoroki blinks, stepping back and clenching his hands into fists at his sides. "And you're not your quirks! You're a *person* ." Izuku raises his right hand in front of him, his fist shaking from exertion as he holds it up-- a challenge. Todoroki grits his teeth, rushing forward, but Izuku dodges easily, shoving Todoroki away with an elbow. The ice that creeps up his arm stings, but Izuku ignores it.

"I'm not going to use his power," Todoroki hisses, shaking his head. "I'm not going to be like him." Izuku reaches forward, grabbing the front of Todoroki's shirt again, and Todoroki flinches back. Izuku keeps his grip on the fabric, though, and he can feel the way Todoroki is shaking.

"It's not his power, Todoroki, it's *yours* . The only person you're hurting right now is yourself."

Izuku takes a deep breath, staring into Todoroki's wide eyes.

"Use your fire," Izuku says, lips quirking up into a smile. " *Your* fire. Not his." He squeezes his hand where it's twisted up in the fabric of Todoroki's shirt. Todoroki shoves him away, and Izuku doesn't have the strength to react, letting himself be shoved a few steps back. Todoroki takes a deep breath, and orange flames erupt from his left side, burning away the thin frost that had gathered on his skin. Izuku has to blink against the bright glow, his face stinging from the heat.

"Why are you doing this?" Todoroki asks, barely visible through the fire. "Don't you want to win, too? Why are you trying to help me?"

Izuku grins. "Isn't that what heroes do?" He asks, and he sees Todoroki's lips crack into a smile.

"Yeah," he says, smile audible in his voice. "I want to be a hero too," He raises his left hand, fire crackling around it. "I'm not responsible for what happens to you next."

Izuku laughs, stepping forward. "What do you mean?" he asks, flames rising around him. "I'm still going to win," he says, flinging himself directly into Todoroki's blast, the fire whipping around him, hot and burning. Izuku can feel his skin bubbling up, peeling off, but he moves forward anyway. *I have to do this before I lose consciousness*, he thinks, twisting back and throwing the strongest punch he can. His knuckles collide with Todoroki's jaw, hard, and Izuku can only hope it was enough.

He feels the flames fall around him, but he can't see, and it takes him a moment to realize that he'd shut his eyes, at some point. There's a roaring in his ears that he thinks might be the audience, but he can't tell if they're cheering for him or Todoroki. Izuku tries to take a step, tries to move, but shifting his weight is enough to make him stumble. He cracks an eye open to see the sky above him as he falls, his head knocking against the hard ground with a crack before he loses himself to darkness.

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Izuku opens his eyes to the familiar sight of the infirmary's ceiling. He stares at the white tile for just a moment before sighing, pressing his eyes shut again. The realization settles into his stomach like cement, a slow, painful knowledge. His head hurts, and he can feel tears starting to fill his eyes.

"Deku?" Uraraka's voice makes Izuku blink his eyes open again, turning his head to see her sitting at his bedside, Todoroki and Yaoyorozu beside her. Izuku blinks the tears out of his eyes, sitting up.

"You're awake," Todoroki says, his expression unreadable. There's a dark bruise on the underside of his jaw, a purple and blue mark where Izuku must have hit him. His nose is mostly healed, with a yellowing edge to the bruise. The blood has been wiped away. Izuku looks at him, bites his lip.

"I lost to you again," he says, unable to keep the sadness out of his voice. Todoroki tilts his head slightly, his right brow raising the tiniest bit.

"Again?" He shakes his head. "You won, Midoriya." He looks down, and Izuku follows his gaze to where Izuku's hand rests on the bedspread. Izuku can see healing bruises and burns there, his skin shiny and red, like a bad sunburn.

"I won?" he asks, his voice sounding small. He takes a moment to look over himself. He's wearing scrubs, something Recovery Girl must have given him, and he's wrapped up in bandages. He can

feel his burns, can feel where the skin has been taken off the bottoms of his feet, but when he presses a hand into his side, the cut there is mostly healed, and he feels better than he should, all things considered.

“Yeah!” Uraraka pipes up, a bright grin on her face. “You knocked him out all like,” she mimes a punch in the air, “and then you stood there all burnt and stuff and just like, stared up at the sky and passed out.” She looks at him, her smile dropping into something softer. “You worried all of us up in the stands, you know.”

“S-Sorry,” Izuku says, blinking and glancing around the room. “How long have I--”

“Not long,” Yaoyorozu says. “Recovery Girl wanted to wait until you’d woken up to finish healing you. I can go get her now, if you want?” She tips her head.

Izuku nods. “Yes, please!” He replies, smiling at her. Yaoyorozu nods, standing up from her seat and brushing off the front of her uniform before turning and opening the door, stepping into the next room.

“Did I really win?” he asks, looking down at his hands. It feels unreal, after all of these tries. Like a joke.

“Yup,” Uraraka says. “You’ve still got the finals, though.” Izuku looks up at her.

“Has the other semifinal happened yet?” he asks, anxiety and excitement mixing in his throat. “Who is it between?”

“You haven’t been paying attention to that?” Todoroki asks, tipping his head slightly to the side. “It hasn’t started yet, no. They had to repair the field after our fight.” He smiles faintly, looking down at his hands. “It’s between Monoma and Bakugou, by the way.”

Izuku blinks, because he knows how that fight goes. “Oh,” he says, just as there’s a knock at the door. Izuku startles, turning to see Recovery Girl stepping inside, Yaoyorozu close behind her.

“Now,” Recovery Girl says, walking up to Izuku’s bed. “How are you feeling, young man?” Uraraka and Todoroki scoot their chairs to the side, letting Recovery Girl get right up to his bedside. Izuku gives her a polite smile.

“Much better, thank you!” He chirps, and she tsks at him.

“If this is your idea of much better, your pain tolerance is something else, sonny.” She sighs, leaning forward and kissing him on the forehead. He feels a layer of pain evaporate from his body, and he sighs in relief, even as the thick exhaustion sets in.

“Thank you,” he breathes, and she hums in acknowledgement.

“You’ll need to rest and eat before your next match,” she says, reaching into her pocket and pulling out a handful of brightly colored gummies. “Eat these, and a full meal if you can stomach it. I haven’t forgotten that you’ve been doing this all while sick.” Izuku feels his face flush red.

“You’re sick?” Todoroki asks, blinking, and Izuku shrugs.

“N-Not really,” he says, and Uraraka snorts from her spot beside Recovery Girl.

“Deku threw up after lunch,” she says, a mixture of exasperation and worry in her voice. “And he still wanted to compete, so Aizawa-sensei let him.”

“After your final match, I want to see you back here,” Recovery Girl says, leveling him with a stare. “Although I wouldn’t be surprised if you ended up being carried back here, considering what happened last round.” She shakes her hand, still holding the gummies, and Izuku flushes red, cupping his hands and taking them from her.

“Can he watch the other semifinal?” Uraraka asks, and Recovery Girl turns to look at her.

“Of course, dearie. Just make sure he eats and doesn’t jump around. He’ll want his stamina.” She turns to look at Todoroki, next. “Will you let me heal the rest of that, now?”

Todoroki nods, looking down at the ground, and Recovery Girl smooches him too. Izuku watches the bruises evaporate off of his face in awe. Watching Recovery Girl’s quirk in action is always impressive.

“Why didn’t you get it healed before?” Izuku asks, the words out of his mouth before he can think better of it. Todoroki blinks up at him, but it’s Uraraka answers for him with a laugh.

“He wanted to be here when you woke up!” She chirps, giggling. “Isn’t that sweet?”

“I’m the one who injured him,” Todoroki says, his tone defensive. “It’s only fair.” His cheeks are tinted slightly red, though, and when Uraraka laughs, Izuku joins in.

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Izuku settles into his seat in the stands, his new sports uniform feeling soft and clean against his skin. Recovery Girl had given it to him to change into, and it’s nice to be in something new after all of these fights and resets, even if it is identical to the last one. He’s glad she’d given him a long sleeved one, too, although he supposes she probably saw his scars. He’s not really sure; the burns might have hidden them. When he was changing, he’d struggled to find them on his skin, so maybe she hadn’t noticed.

Uraraka plops into the seat next to him, juggling two large containers of popcorn. The salty, buttery smell drifts towards Izuku’s nose, and he flushes red when his stomach grumbles loudly.

“Hungry?” Uraraka asks, giggling. “This one’s for you, since RG said you need to eat,” she says, passing him one of the containers. The outside of the paper bag is warm, the heat seeping through the material into Izuku’s fingers.

“RG?” He asks, sticking a piece of popcorn in his mouth. It melts on his tongue, delicious in the way things only are when he’s really, really hungry.

“Recovery Girl, duh!” Uraraka says, grinning. Izuku looks up past her as he sees Todoroki picking his way down the aisle. He stops in front of Uraraka and Izuku, staring.

“Hey, Todoroki!” Izuku smiles. “Did you want to sit with us?”

Todoroki blinks. “Yes,” he says, walking past Uraraka and Izuku to sit on Izuku’s other side. He sits in the chair gingerly. Izuku wonders how someone so powerful can be nervous about something like this.

“This should be easy for Bakugou,” Uraraka comments as Izuku angles his bag of popcorn, offering some to Todoroki. Todoroki shakes his head no, and Izuku hums, looking over at Uraraka.

“I don’t know,” he says, trying to sound like he hasn’t seen the fight before. “Monoma’s quirk lets him copy others’ quirks, right? Kacchan’s quirk will be useful in one on one combat like this, even

if Monoma isn't used to it." He bites at the skin of his lip, ripping off a small piece of it as he glances down at the field. Neither Kacchan nor Monoma are visible right now, and Izuku would guess they're waiting in the tunnels.

"Well, I'm rooting for Monoma," Uraraka says, leaning back in her seat and propping her feet up on the seat in front of her. "I want you to win, Deku, and no offense, but Bakugou is basically the worst possible match for you."

Izuku laughs nervously. "I-I want Kacchan to win," he admits. "I don't know if I want to fight him, though."

"I think you'd beat Bakugou," Todoroki says, serious. "You're both skilled at hand to hand, but he relies on his quirk, and in battle training you proved that you know his fighting style well." He pauses. "You knew mine, too. Did you review the tapes in preparation?"

Izuku blinks. "I, um." He swallows nervously. "I-I didn't really know your style, I-I just guessed I think!" He shoves a handful of popcorn in his mouth, hoping it'll keep him from saying anything stupid.

"Your battle instincts are impressive, then," Todoroki says, still looking at him. Izuku feels his face turning red, and he smiles at Todoroki with his teeth covered, still chewing on his mouthful of food.

"Look," Uraraka breathes. "They're starting." Izuku whips his head, watching as Monoma and Kacchan step onto the field. They're on opposite sides from last time, so Izuku can see Kacchan's face, as blurry as it is from this distance. It looks like he's either smiling or snarling. Probably a combination of both.

"Alright, listeners! It's finally time for the second semifinal!" Present Mic calls, and Izuku feels himself shiver, slightly. He's not sure if it's anxiety or excitement.

"This semifinal will be between Katsuki Bakugou of class 1-A and Neito Monoma of class 1-B. Whoever wins will move on to the finals, where they will face off against class 1-A's Izuku Midoriya." Izuku flushes as Present Mic says his name. "I don't think any further introductions are necessary, not after the impression these two made in their other matches! Ready?" Izuku watches Kacchan crouch into his fighting stance. Monoma doesn't, of course. Izuku can tell he's making a mocking face at Kacchan even from here.

"Start!" Present Mic calls, and Kacchan rushes forward with a right hook. Izuku grips his fingers on the popcorn bag, crinkling the paper as he leans forward, biting at his lip. *You can't do that*, he thinks at Kacchan as Monoma easily dodges the hit, *you have to do something surprising, or he beats you*.

Kacchan growls, the enhanced image on the TV hanging above focusing in on the curl to his lip, the almost feral look he gets. He slides in like he's going for another right hook, and Monoma dodges accordingly, ducking in and to the side, but Kacchan's face twists into a vicious grin. His other hand shoots out, grabbing Monoma by the front of his uniform and jerking him in as Kacchan headbutts his face.

"Isn't that your move?" Todoroki asks, a hand going up to touch his nose. Izuku blinks, watching Kacchan move his right arm to fire an explosion into Monoma's stomach, one that makes the kid wince and stumble back, wiping blood from his nose.

"Kind of," Izuku mumbles, watching as Kacchan sneers, giving Monoma the middle finger.

“You like that, you stupid bastard?” Kacchan says, his voice projected so the audience can hear. “Copy my quirk and fight me for real, asshole.” Izuku blinks.

“He wants him to copy his quirk?” Uraraka asks, her mouth half-full of popcorn. “Won’t that make it harder for him?”

“I-I think that’s the point,” Izuku says. “He doesn’t want to win unless he can beat Monoma at his best.” It’s been a theme for Kacchan. He’s never been willing to cheat on tests, to take things easy. Would Kacchan think Izuku’s quirk is cheating? Taking the easy way out?

Monoma shrugs, and he reaches out and taps Kacchan’s extended arm, his fingers contacting his wrist. “Don’t mind if I do,” he says, stepping back and watching as Kacchan gets back into a fighting stance. Monoma flexes his hands, little explosions crackling off of his palms. He looks up at Kacchan and grins, then Kacchan is rushing in at him. Izuku watches, his eyes having a hard time tracking their motions as Kacchan throws a kick that Monoma blocks with an explosion, only for Kacchan to feint another right hook and punctuate the movement with an explosion of his own as he hits Monoma with an elbow instead. It’s dizzying to watch, the field filling with dark smoke and flashing lights. Izuku can’t even take his eyes off of them long enough to look down at his popcorn, and he gropes blindly at it without looking so that he’ll have something in his stomach for the next fight.

There’s an explosion that’s different, bigger. Izuku can’t see any of the ring, let alone the two fighting inside of it, but he *can* see the way Cementoss and Midnight both step closer, grimaces on their faces. Izuku scoots to the edge of his seat, like those few extra inches will help him see.

The smoke starts to clear, and it’s on a very different scene from the end of the last fight. Monoma is on the ground, his body facing up and his hands wrapped around Kacchan’s ankle where he’s pressing one foot to Monoma’s throat. Monoma’s hands are smoking and crackling, matching Kacchan’s palms where they’re held pointed at Monoma’s face.

“Give up,” Kacchan growls, “or I’ll blow your ugly face off.” Izuku can see that Midnight is shouting something to Kacchan, but Kacchan is ignoring her. Monoma struggles against Kacchan’s foot, coughing visible even from up in the stands. He looses a small burst of explosions into Kacchan’s leg, and Izuku winces even though Kacchan doesn’t. He knows how much that would hurt. Monoma drops his hands and sighs.

“I give up,” he says, the TV zooming in to show his face, smeared with ash and sweaty.

“Monoma has conceded! The victory goes to Bakugou, who will be facing off against Midoriya from his own class in the final round!” Present Mic shouts, and the audience erupts into cheers. Izuku finds himself joining in, screaming and clapping as he stands up from his seat, shoving his popcorn at Todoroki.

“We’ll take a one hour break to allow the combatants to rest and heal before their match, and then it’ll be time for our last match!” Present Mic says, whooping, and Izuku turns to Uraraka, smiling.

“Kacchan did it!” He shouts, over the cheers of the audience. Uraraka gives him a confused smile.

“Deku, you know you’re going to have to fight him, right?” She shouts back, and Izuku glances back down at the field. He could be imagining it, but it looks like Kacchan is staring back at him from the way his face is tilted towards the stands.

“Yeah!” Izuku shouts, breathless. “I know.” He can’t help the swell of anxiety and excitement that rises in him, bright and buzzing. *I don’t know if I can beat him*, Izuku thinks, *but I already beat*

Todoroki. No matter how I do here, I'll surely have eyes on me for internships. He clenches his hands into fists, grinning. That doesn't mean I'm not going to try, though, Kacchan!

Chapter End Notes

cw: canon child abuse

YEAH OUR BOY FINALLY DID IT!!!! and next up is the finals :D

also i noticed that i've been saying work study when i meant internships... forgive me!!
im but a stupid flawed human being for some reason.

join the discord if u dare >:) we're very nice and it's super chill
<https://discord.gg/Vqaj62ceCt>

sports festival, part 8

Chapter Summary

last time: izuku beats todoroki! bakugou beats monoma!

Chapter Notes

THE LAST SPORTS FESTIVAL CHAP!!!! im v v excited both for the conclusion to this and for the next arc so :3c

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

The prep room is quieter than Izuku likes. He wraps his hand around the water bottle he's holding, the plastic crinkling under his grip. He stares at the table in front of him, at his own blurry shadow.

The door opens suddenly, slamming open with force, and Izuku flinches so hard he almost jumps out of his chair. He turns his head to see Kacchan, starting in the doorway with a bewildered look on his face.

"Huh?" Kacchan leans out of the door. "Why are you--" He blinks, looking back to Izuku. "Fuck, this is prep room two." Izuku smiles, looking back at his water bottle and wrapping his hands around it.

"Hi, Kacchan," he says, quietly, and he hears Kacchan breathe out loudly through his nose.

"Deku," Kacchan says, stepping further into the room. "You'd better not go fucking easy on me."

"I won't," Izuku replies, squeezing the water bottle and hearing it crackle. He doesn't look up at Kacchan.

"You know what I fucking mean," Kacchan snarls, slamming a hand on the table. "Use your secret fucking quirk!" Izuku glances up at him, blinks.

"I-I can't," he says, watching Kacchan's brow twitch. "It--it wouldn't help me in the middle of combat like that." He sighs. "It'd make me more likely to lose, not less."

Kacchan narrows his eyes at him. "You'd better fight me at least twice as hard as you fought stupid half-and-half, then."

"Don't be mad when I fight dirty then," Izuku says, looking up at him and smiling. Kacchan smirks.

"I wouldn't expect anything less from you, you fucking animal." Kacchan says, his voice a growl. His gaze lingers on Izuku. "You really can't use it in combat?"

Izuku shakes his head. "Not like this. Hey, Kacchan, how did you beat Monoma?" he asks before

he can think better of it. Kacchan's eye twitches and his smirk drops into a scowl.

"What the fuck do you mean? You watched the damn fight." Kacchan is growling as he stands beside Izuku.

"I-I mean," Izuku fumbles, "y-you wouldn't have--" he cuts himself off. "It--Nevermind." His heartbeat is too fast for him to come up with an explanation, for him to explain exactly *how* he knows that Kacchan would have lost. Did lose.

Kacchan narrows his eyes. "Fucking what, Deku?" he snarls, then looks away. "Are you going to make me fucking say it?"

Izuku blinks. "Say what?" Kacchan's head whips back to look at him.

"That I was fucking inspired by your bullshit fight with IcyHot, idiot." He blows air out his nose. "Don't take it as a fucking compliment," he says, turning and stomping toward the door. "You fight like a wild fucking animal," he snarls, opening the door and glancing back at Izuku. "Don't hold back on me, or I'll kill your stupid ass right there."

Izuku smiles at him and chuckles nervously. "I-I wouldn't dream of it, Kacchan."

--

There's something different about standing in the tunnel, now that Izuku knows it's the last time. It's quieter, somehow, but he can also hear the chatter of the audience louder than ever. It crawls around the edges of his senses, a low buzz of conversation. Izuku prays that he's the topic of some of the talking, even though he hates the thought of the attention on him. *Making it to the finals will surely be enough for me to get an internship*, he thinks, *right?*

He's alone in the tunnel this time, and he supposes it makes sense. Aizawa and All Might have spoken to him plenty today, both this time through and the others. Kacchan's mom and dad aren't here since they're not pro heroes, and even if they *were* here, they wouldn't have any weird speeches to give to Izuku like Todoroki's father did. Izuku's known them since he was a child. Even if they haven't seen him in a few years, they *know* him, have known him since he was in diapers and his and Kacchan's mom took turns watching them so they could work.

The tunnel is darker than last time, the shadows cutting sharper lines in the ground outside. Izuku thinks it's because the last remaining dregs of the morning fog have finally burny away, leaving the sun to shine unadulterated on the ground. Across the field, across the packed dirt and the familiar white tape, Izuku can see Kacchan. His childhood friend is alone in his tunnel, too. He's staring out at Izuku like Izuku is staring at him, his arms crossed over his chest and his eyes so bright red that Izuku thinks they might be glowing.

Izuku takes a deep breath, squeezing and unsqueezing his hands at his sides, then stepping forward into the sunlight. The bright light falls into his eyes, stinging them, but he keeps his gaze held high, watching as Kacchan steps out, too. The sun makes his hair glow nearly white as they walk into the ring, facing each other in matching sports uniforms.

"Kacchan," Izuku whispers, barely above a breath. Kacchan tips his head to the side ever so slightly.

"Deku," he says, his tone as neutral as it gets. A light breeze blows through the stadium, brushing Izuku's hair against his forehead.

"For the final match of the first year tournament," Present Mic calls, dramatic and excited, "we

have Katsuki Bakugou and Izuku Midoriya from class 1-A of the hero course. Now, I don't know how true this is, but I've heard these two are actually childhood friends!" Izuku watches Kacchan scowl. "This match will be especially interesting because as I'm sure you've heard by now, Midoriya is quirkless." Izuku starts at the mention of it. He sees Kacchan's brows twitch.

"Midoriya defeated his first three opponents using his strong combat skills and impressive instincts! Bakugou, on the other hand, has an incredibly powerful quirk as I'm sure you've all seen." Kacchan's eyes are red, red, red as he stares Izuku down. "His quirk control and his battle skills are impressive, especially for a first year! I'm personally on the edge of my seat already." Present Mic chuckles. "Well, with that said, are we ready?" The crowd roars. Izuku bends his knees and raises his hands, settling into his fighting stance. Kacchan does the same, his stance lower and closer to his body than Izuku's. There's already sweat glistening on the skin of his palms, visible where his fingers are curling into loose fists.

"Start!" Present Mic shouts, and Izuku is moving to dodge Kacchan's right hook before the other boy even throws it. *It's like tradition*, Izuku thinks as he ducks to the side of the punch, blocking the knee strike Kacchan throws along with it. Kacchan whirls around to face him again, pointing a palm at him and loosing an explosion that makes Izuku's hair whip around his face and the heat sting his eyes. It's a smokescreen, though, and Izuku is familiar enough with Kacchan's fighting to know that he'll slide in low, where the smoke is sinking to. Izuku slides back just as Kacchan tries to sweep out his legs, and Izuku follows the movement with a punch that cracks against the side of Kacchan's face, his cheekbone digging into the flesh of Izuku's hands. Izuku slides back from the hit when Kacchan grins, holding his hands up and popping off small blasts from them.

"Are you fucking ready, Deku?!" He snarls, flexing his fingers. Izuku bites his lip and grins back at him despite the nerves bubbling in his chest.

"Are you, Kacchan?" Izuku replies, stepping his right foot forward and turning around completely to throw a hook kick that Kacchan blocks with his forearm, stepping into Izuku's space to shove a palm into his chest.

"When am I not?" Kacchan asks as he explodes his hand into Izuku's skin. Izuku hisses, his feet grinding against the ground as the force of the blast pushes him back. He catches his balance just as Kacchan steps toward him again, his hands smoking as he uses two blasts to balance himself as he throws a kick forward at Izuku. Izuku dodges in and to the side, elbowing Kacchan in the ribs. Izuku can feel the what of his body as he grunts, stepping back and glaring at Izuku. Izuku takes his chance, reaching in to grab Kacchan's collar and yanking him in, smashing their foreheads together.

"You remember this move, Kacchan?" He says, breathless and laughing as he jerks his knee up to hit Kacchan in the crotch. Kacchan *squeaks*, jolting back and hissing in pain before shoving his hand at Izuku's collar, grabbing him so they're both holding each other.

"Don't fucking try me," Kacchan grunts, throwing his head into Izuku's nose. Izuku laughs despite the hot pain that burns his eyes, taking the chance to shove his free hand into Kacchan's gut in a strong punch that makes Kacchan let go of him and step back. Izuku lets him, wiping blood off of his nose with his sleeve as he realizes, suddenly and wildly, that he's *enjoying this*.

He steps in, throwing a kick that swings into Kacchan's block, making his rival take a step to the side. Kacchan growls, exploding a hand into Izuku's ankle, and it hurts but Izuku finds he doesn't mind. He uses the opening to throw a kick that grazes Kacchan's temple, leaving a red mark on the side of his forehead that matches the bruise already forming in the center of it.

There's something different about this fight, Izuku thinks as Kacchan dives forward, punching Izuku square in the chest. *I'm not fighting for my life, and I...* He twists closer, returning the punch

with one of his own. He gets an explosion to the face for his trouble, one that leaves stars in his eyes that he has to blink away as he steps back.

I'm having fun, he realizes as Kacchan charges at him. Izuku steps out of the way, turning around and moving back to reposition himself in the center of the ring. Kacchan is panting, a vicious grin on his face and a smear of dark ash on his cheek.

“You keep fucking dodging, Deku,” Kacchan says, laughing darkly. “I’m going to fucking blast your brains out.” Izuku grins back at him, swinging a foot forward and feinting at a kick. Kacchan blocks it, leaving himself open for when Izuku grabs him at the waist and flips him over his shoulder, slamming him onto his back on the ground.

“You were saying?” Izuku says, giggling as Kacchan hisses at him. He starts to haul himself up, and Izuku stomps on his chest, just because he can. Kacchan wraps his hands around Izuku’s foot and fires off a stinging series of blasts, ones strong enough that Izuku has to flinch back and hop away on one foot to gather himself, giving Kacchan time to lurch to his feet, grinning with all his teeth showing.

“Just you fucking *wait*,” Kacchan growls, charging at Izuku with crackling palms. Izuku has time to brace himself, guarding his face and chest, but the force of the blasts are still strong enough to knock the air out of him. He barely stops himself from falling, stumbling a few steps back instead.

“I’ve got you working up a sweat, I guess,” Izuku says as the smoke clears, dodging the right hook Kacchan throws. He uses the proximity to knee Kacchan in the crotch again, and Kacchan jerks out of the way, hissing.

“Again with the fucking ball shot,” Kacchan grumbles, glaring daggers at Izuku. “Can’t you come up with anything else?” Izuku shrugs, throwing a lazy kick that he knows Kacchan will block. He uses it to move close again, out of Kacchan’s kicking range.

“I have a couple of ideas,” Izuku says as Kacchan punches at him, just like he expected. Izuku grabs Kacchan’s wrist and tugs his arm in, sinking his teeth into the meat of his forearm just enough to taste blood. He pulls away as Kacchan’s hand starts exploding by his ear, and Izuku can’t hear his own laughing over the ringing in his ears, but it’s worth it.

“God, what the fuck Deku?!” Kacchan screams, reaching at him with a sparking palm. Izuku giggles, dodging and elbowing Kacchan again.

“You’re the one who called me an animal earlier!” He shouts back, feeling a drop of sweat run down the side of his face. “It’s your fault,” he laughs, as Kacchan snarls at him, sliding out of the way of a punch.

“Get over here, Deku,” Kacchan yells, his palms crackling and popping as he charges forward, exploding his hands in Izuku’s face. The impact makes Izuku dizzy, but he doesn’t let it distract him as he sweeps Kacchan’s feet, making the man stumble but not fall. Izuku feels his blood rushing in his ears as he ducks in to slam his fist into Kacchan’s stomach, just below the ribs. Kacchan coughs, sputtering, and Izuku uses the chance to grab Kacchan’s head and slam his chin down into Izuku’s knee. Izuku hears Kacchan’s teeth clack together loudly, and he bites his lip in sympathy.

Kacchan blinks for a moment, like he’s surprised, then he explodes, the smoke and light blinding Izuku for a second. He feels a warm hand wrap itself in the fabric of his uniform and another grab his side, then he’s flying, flipped over Kacchan’s shoulder.

Izuku feels his breath leave him in a rush as his back slams into the ground, and he looks up at Kacchan, at the wide grin on his face and the smoke clearing around them, and Izuku grins back, trying to sit up. He blinks in surprise when he realizes his limbs aren't responding to him, his arms and legs just shaking. He watches Kacchan's face twitch, his brows furrow slightly.

"Get up, Deku," Kacchan says, nudging Izuku's side with his foot. There's no weight behind it, and Izuku swallows, twisting on the ground, trying to get up. He can't and the sky above him is twisting and mixing with Kacchan's face in his vision.

"Midoriya," Midnight asks from the side of the ring, "Can you move?"

"Uh," Izuku replies, eloquently. He strains, pressing his arms into the ground behind him and trying to lift himself up. "I-I don't..." He lifts himself up about an inch off of the ground, then falls back down, his exhausted muscles giving out. "I don't think so," he replies, blinking up at Kacchan. Kacchan's face is still hovering over his, his usual scowl painted on his lips. He's blurry, though, and Izuku struggles to focus on him.

"The match is over!" Present Mic shouts. "Midoriya is unable to move. Bakugou wins first place!" The audience erupts in cheers around them, and Izuku smiles up at Kacchan, who narrows his eyes at him.

"That was fun, wasn't it Kacchan?" Izuku asks, something fuzzy and fizzy bubbling in his head. He giggles, watching Kacchan's eyes narrow. Kacchan huffs a loud sigh, then holds out his hand. The skin there is scuffed from explosions, scraped up and bruised. Izuku stares at it.

"Take my fucking hand, Deku," Kacchan growls, shaking it in air. Izuku blinks, reaching up a hand and gripping Kacchan's. Kacchan hauls him up, pulling him to his feet, and Izuku sways with the motion, blinking as black fuzzies fill his vision.

"We haven't held hands like this since we were kids," Izuku says, his voice slurring. Kacchan frowns, grabbing onto his shoulders and holding him up as his legs buckle underneath him. "Oops." Izuku giggles. "I can't stand." He leans into Kacchan. "You're all cool. Like, temperature wise."

"Yeah, because you're running a fucking fever," Kacchan says, voice a low rumble. "Oi, Deku, did I give you a concussion?"

"Prolly," Izuku replies, shrugging. "'M gonna pass out, by the way."

"Don't you fucking dare, Deku," Kacchan growls. "Why the fuck do you have a fever?"

"Shh," Izuku says. "It's a secret." Kacchan narrows his eyes at him, then whispers,

"I thought you couldn't use your quirk in combat?" He seems angry, his red eyes narrowed.

"Can't," Izuku confirms, letting his eyes slide shut. "Used it between events."

"What the fuck-- Deku, don't pass out, explain yourself!" Kacchan gives him a shake, but Izuku just groans, shaking his head. The world is melting into a liquid mess of colors, and he can't process what Kacchan is asking him to do.

"Tired," he mumbles, and Kacchan sighs. Izuku feels a strong arm slide under his legs and lift him. He vaguely processes that *hey, Kacchan is carrying me!* before he loses consciousness.

--

Izuku blinks his eyes open in the cool light of the infirmary. For a moment he's confused, wondering why he's tucked under a thin sheet and why he can hear the soft noise of chatter outside, but then he refocuses and his brain reminds him about his fight with Kacchan. He blinks at the ceiling, then slides his gaze to the side.

Kacchan is in a chair by his bedside, his arms folded over his chest and his head tilted to the side, his cheek pillowed on his shoulder. His eyes are shut, and there are thin streaks of ash on his face where it hadn't been cleaned off. His chest rises and falls slowly in his sleep. Izuku blinks, then looks to the side at a blur of motion in his peripheral vision.

Uraraka is waving at him, with Todoroki next to her. He stares at Izuku for a second, then waves one hand. Izuku smiles.

"How long has he been asleep?" He whispers, jerking his head at Kacchan. Uraraka giggles silently.

"Since he got healed, basically," she whispers back at him. "He said he wasn't leaving you alone until he got an explanation?" She shakes her head, rolling her eyes. "It didn't really make any sense. He also wants to keep fighting."

"Are you okay?" Todoroki asks. "You're still sick." He watches Izuku, even when Uraraka nudges him and presses a finger to her lips, quietly shushing him.

"I'm okay," Izuku replies, then looks over to Kacchan, reaching out a hand to rest on Kacchan's shoulder. It's warm, even through his uniform. "Kacchan," he says, softly. "Wake up." Kacchan shifts, his eyes fluttering open. The peaceful look on his face lasts from only a few more seconds before his eyes snap up to Izuku's and his face twists into a snarl. He reaches forward, grabbing the front of Izuku's shirt.

"Fucking Deku," he snarls, yanking Izuku forward. "I want a goddamn rematch." Izuku blinks, holding up his hands in surrender.

"Y-You beat me, though?" Izuku asks, blinking in surprise as Uraraka mouths something that look suspiciously like *I told you so* from behind Kacchan.

"Yeah, and it doesn't fucking *count*," Kacchan snarls, his breath hot on Izuku's face. "I don't want to beat you because you're sick, I want to beat you because I fucking beat you." Izuku blinks, then sighs.

"You would have beat me either way," Izuku says, wrapping one of his hands over Kacchan's wrist. "Can you please put me down?"

"Fucking fine," Kacchan says, dropping him. "But we're talking about this later. In *private*," he says, eyes pointedly moving to glare at Todoroki and Uraraka. Izuku swallows nervously.

"Sure," he says, then looks at Uraraka and stage-whispers to her, "Please help me."

"Oi!" Kacchan shouts, kicking one of the legs of the bed loudly. "I fucking heard that, asshat!"

--

Izuku stands on the second place riser, his legs shaking. The audience is loud around him, their cheers burning the tips of his ears and making him feel like he's made of jello. It doesn't help that Kacchan keeps setting off explosions on the first place spot next to him, raising his hands into the air and firing off large blasts while cackling. Each other sends the audience into a new uproar, and

Izuku is more than ready for it to be over.

“Can we leave yet?” He asks, glancing up at Kacchan, who ignores him. The shiny gold medal hanging around his neck bobs and bounces as he jumps up, exploding the air around him. Izuku winces. He would very much like to not have people looking at him on live television right now, actually.

“I think so,” Izuku blinks, leaning forward to see Todoroki looking at him from the third place riser. Next to him, Monoma is standing with his arms folded over his chest. They’re wearing matching bronze medals, and Izuku reaches up to fiddle with the silver one hanging from his own neck. The metal is smooth and cool under his fingers.

“I’m quite over this whole ordeal myself,” Monoma says, stepping off of the third place riser. “It was fun until Blasty decided to make his own fireworks.” He rolls his eyes, and Izuku blinks, hopping down off of his own riser.

“I thought you hated me,” he says, letting it slip out before he can think better of it. Monoma raises an eyebrow at him, his lips quirking up into a slight smirk.

“Was I too obvious?” He says, meeting Izuku’s gaze. “I don’t hate you specifically, you know. I just don’t like 1-A and all of your stuck-up attitudes.”

“We’re not stuck up,” Todoroki says, and Monoma turns, glaring at him.

“Are you kidding? You’re one of the worst,” he says, sneering. He looks back over to Izuku. “Let’s walk,” he says, starting toward one of the exit tunnels. “I don’t know about you, but my ears are starting to hurt.” Izuku nods, following after him. He can barely make out the sound of Todoroki’s footsteps behind them, mostly covered by the blasts still sounding from the arena. There’s something odd about walking back into the tunnels like this, something uncomfortable about it. It makes Izuku feel like he’s going to have to do this all again, even though he’s not going to reset.

Monoma stops in the dark of the tunnel, turning to face Izuku. Izuku and Todoroki both pause, too, and Monoma’s eyes narrow when they look at Todoroki.

“Leave, Todoroki,” Monoma says, voice low and commanding. “I want to speak with Midoriya alone.” He slides his hands into his pockets, staring Todoroki down. Todoroki glances over to Izuku, his face neutral.

“Are you okay with that?” he asks, and Izuku blinks.

“Y-Yeah,” Izuku says, because he can’t imagine Monoma is going to say anything worse to him now than he did during their fight, the fight that only Izuku gets to remember. Plus, if worst comes to worst, Izuku knows for a fact he can take Monoma in a fight.

“Alright,” Todoroki says, turning to walk past Monoma, through the door and into the hallway. Izuku watches the door fall shut behind him. Monoma sighs, meeting Izuku’s gaze with blue-grey eyes.

“Midoriya,” Monoma says. “I want to make something clear. During the cavalry battle, I implied that I disliked you because of your quirkless status.” Izuku blinks, and Monoma presses on. “I want to make it clear that I dislike you for being in class 1-A and generally being annoying, not because of your lack of a quirk.”

Izuku squints at him. “But you still dislike me...?” Monoma rolls his eyes.

“Of course I still dislike you. You’re in class 1-A,” he says, his lip curling up like he’s smelled something rotten. “I hate all of you.”

“O-Okay,” Izuku says. “Can I go now?”

“I’m not done yet,” Monoma says, sighing. “Listen, I want you to *swear* not to tell anybody about what I’m about to tell you.” Izuku frowns.

“I-I swear?” He swallows nervously as Monoma meets his gaze.

“My younger sister is quirkless,” Monoma says, biting at his lower lip for just a moment before stopping and glancing off to the side. “So I wanted you to know I don’t actually have a problem with quirkless people. And I suppose I wanted to apologize for using that against you.”

Izuku blinks. “O-Oh,” he says, shifting nervously on his feet. “I-It’s okay.” Monoma sighs, looking at him again.

“Do you have the extra toe joint?” Monoma asks, and Izuku remembers this from their fight, from the fight that got erased.

“No,” Izuku says, shaking his head. He knows what’s coming next, but he still doesn’t want to hear it.

“I can tell if someone has a quirk or not when I use mine on them,” Monoma says, holding a hand out. “If you’d like, I could tell you whether you’re truly quirkless or not.”

Izuku shakes his head. “No.” He doesn’t have to think about it.

“No?” Monoma tips his head slightly, dropping his hand. “I would have thought you’d want to know.” He sounds different than during their fight, calmer. Like he really doesn’t mean any harm in it. Izuku supposes that if he didn’t already know the answer, didn’t already know about his quirk, it might be something he had to think about, but...

“It doesn’t matter, does it?” Izuku holds his hands out, looking down at them. “I’m still functionally quirkless. Still legally quirkless. Even if I... If I had a quirk, it wouldn’t change anything.” He smiles slightly. “I think it’d be worse, actually. Because then wouldn’t it be my own fault that I’m useless?” He watches a look of surprise and horror pass over Monoma’s face for just a moment.

“Quirkless people aren’t useless,” Monoma says, narrowing his eyes at Izuku. “Whatever. I’m finished.” He turns, putting a hand on the door handle, but Izuku speaks before he leaves.

“Monoma?” The boy pauses, hand already turning the handle to the door. “If we’d been matched up in the tournament, would you have copied my quirk?” Izuku has to know. “To see if I had one?”

Monoma shakes his head, looking over his shoulder at Izuku. “I wouldn’t do it without asking, no. It’s not like it’d help me beat you in combat if you don’t know what it is at this point, yeah?” His eyes flit over Izuku’s face. “Why?”

“No reason,” Izuku says, smiling. “See you at school.”

Monoma snorts. “As if I’d be caught dead with one of you class 1-A rats,” he says as he opens the door and steps out of the tunnel, leaving Izuku alone.

Izuku sees it on the news the night after the sports festival. He's in his bed, curled up under the covers in clean pajamas, his eyes drooping from exhaustion, and he opens his news app, just to have something to read before bed. His stomach is still unhappy with him, and he's sore all over from the fights, but when he reads the headline, he sits up straight, a chill running down his spine.

"Iida..." he breathes, reading it over and over again. *Pro-hero Ingenium in critical condition after attack by Hero Killer Stain.* There are countless articles over the same topic, with headlines that mean the same thing but have been reworded. Izuku peels himself out of bed, stumbling to the bathroom just in time to lean over the toilet and throw up the remains of his dinner, the sharp taste of stomach acid burning his throat. He squeezes his eyes shut for a moment, panting, then rips off a wad of toilet paper and wipes his face with a shaking hand.

Iida's older brother, he thinks, *Iida had been missing, at the end of the festival, and I didn't even ask after him.* Izuku drops the toilet paper in the toilet and opens his phone, scrolling through one of the articles. He feels his breath catch in his throat when he notices the time of the attack. It was around 2 p.m., when the second round tournament fights would have been taking place. Izuku could have done something, if he'd known. He could have reset and warned someone. His hands start to shake, and he drops his phone on the floor. His vision blurs, and he leans over the toilet, the tile floor digging into his bare knees as he retches.

I should have known, he thinks, forcing himself to stand, legs shaking. *I should have done something*. He flushes the toilet and stumbles back to his room, leaving the phone on the floor. *I can still try.*

It's easy to take his knives out of their box. It's easy to sit on his bed, hands shaking, and cut himself open. It's easier than beating Todoroki was or losing to Kacchan was. It's easier than reading those articles. It's easier than thinking about how Izuku lived that day over and over, went through that day multiple times, and still didn't take the time to notice this. How he died over and over for his stupid *pride*, but didn't die to save his friend's brother.

He's dying for that now, at least. It feels foggy and good in a way nothing else does to bleed out, and even though the pounding in his head gets worse near the end, he's okay with it.

--

He wakes up in his bed, bundled under the covers, with the phone in his hand and a pounding headache that makes his vision blur, makes his ears ring. Izuku throws himself out of bed again, running to the bathroom, and this time when he vomits into the toilet, it's tinged dark red with blood, mixing into the katsudon his mom had made for him. Izuku doesn't bother trying to get up; he crouches on the bathroom floor and grips his hands on the toilet seat, shaking with the effort of holding himself up. *It's too late*, is all he can think, over and over again. *It's too late.*

He doesn't know how long he sits there on the bathroom floor, his stomach burning and his bones aching, deep within him in a way that they haven't since the USJ, but eventually he lurches to his feet, flushing the toilet. His skin looks pale in the moonlight filtering through the window when he turns the tap on and washes his hands, using water and a hand towel to scrub the drying blood and vomit from his cheek. His hands don't seem to want to listen to him, twitching oddly and prickling like they're asleep, but he manages to clean himself up before he stumbles back to his room, throwing himself into his bed. His head is aching, pounding and burning with every movement he makes and every tiny sound in the room, but he makes himself fish his phone out from the mess of blankets, makes himself open his text messages and type out a message to Iida and another to Uraraka.

He can't keep his eyes open to wait for a reply, can't stay awake that long, but it's something.

Izuku falls asleep with his heartbeat pounding too fast in his temples and his stomach a fiery hot stone in his belly.

Chapter End Notes

cw: vomiting

i hope u enjoyed!!!! ik a lot of ppl wanted izuku to lose to todoroki or to beat bkg, but i really liked this outcome so dfjkgdhfkj

also sorry about the end there i can't make the WHOLE chapter happy lmao that'd be too nice <3

thank you as always for the support!!! it means the world to me <3 the discord link for u: <https://discord.gg/Vqaj62ceCt>

return to class

Chapter Summary

last time: izuku got second in the sports festival! then learned something real concerning

Chapter Notes

hi gamers im back with another chapter that i cried while writing. have fun :D

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Izuku walks up to the UA gate, fingers curled around the straps of his backpack. He's got a hoodie on over his uniform, the hood pulled up in an attempt to hide his distinctive hair. He's wearing a blue surgical mask, too, but even with that on, he'd still been recognized by four people on the train alone, and as much as it was nice to be congratulated, Izuku doesn't think he has it in him today. It's pouring rain, and the steady white noise of the drizzle is making his headache worse. The umbrella he's holding isn't doing a lot to keep his legs dry, either, and he can only pray they're keeping it warm inside the building. It's not that cold out, but he's shivering even under the layers.

Izuku'd spent the day after the sports festival buried in his blankets, his limbs stiff and tingling and his head pounding with pain. His mom had accepted his excuse of being exhausted from being healed so many times with Recovery Girl's quirk, but Izuku thinks she suspected he was lying when he'd still been tired and weak the next day, too. Izuku's just glad she hadn't caught him hunched over the toilet or when he'd gotten dizzy in the hallway and fallen onto his knees, scraping them on the floor.

He'd thought he was feeling better today, up until when he'd stepped onto the train and been surrounded by the chatter and bright lights of the train and his headache had returned with a vengeance, echoing the deep pain in the bones of his arms and legs. Now, standing outside of UA, he's wondering if he's going to be able to make it through the day. The thought of sitting through lessons, with his teachers speaking loudly and the bright fluorescent lights above him, the screeching of chairs scraping on the floor and then the smells and sounds of food at lunch time... Izuku thinks he might throw up right now, actually.

"Excuse me, I am going to be late for class!" Iida's voice surprises Izuku, and he jumps, slipping in the rain under his shoes. He flails for a moment, dropping his umbrella in an attempt to catch himself, but it's Iida who catches him, his arms wrapped in a clear rain poncho.

"S-Sorry!" Izuku gasps, blinking away the fuzzy bits in his vision. "You surprised me, Iida."

"Midoriya?" Iida blinks, his eyes widening. "I didn't recognize you with that mask on! I apologize, but we need to get moving or we'll be late for homeroom," he says, grabbing ahold of Izuku's arm and straightening him out before reaching down and picking up his fallen umbrella. Izuku takes it from him, staring at him in shock as he turns and starts running towards the school. Izuku blinks, then runs after him, ignoring the way every impact of his feet against the ground sends strange

pins and needles feelings through his feet and ankles.

“Are you okay, Iida?” Izuku asks, casting a worried glance over to his friend. Iida looks back at him and smiles as they reach the door.

“You needn’t worry about my brother,” Iida says, opening the door and smiling. “I apologize if he or I have caused you any undue worry.” He pulls open the door and steps inside, but Izuku still feels like something’s off as he follows his friend through the door. He lets it go for now, but something tells him that it can’t be that easy

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When Izuku slides into his seat in class, most of his friends are already there. Uraraka is in the seat next to him, chatting with Tsuyu, but when Izuku sits down, they both turn to look at him. He’s taken the mask and hoodie off, so there’s nothing hiding his face, and he sees the worried turn to Uraraka’s brows.

“Deku, are you okay? You’re all red...” She reaches out a hand to feel his forehead, and Izuku flails his hands to get away from her, but not before she rests a cool hand on his flushed skin. Her frown deepens.

“It feels like you have a fever,” she says, and Izuku doesn’t miss the way Kaminari and Kacchan both turn to look at him when she says that.

“I-I don’t!” He says, waving his hands in a placating gesture. “It’s probably from, um, running, I-I was going to be late, so--”

“He was nearly late,” Iida cuts in from where he’s sitting, notes out neatly in front of him. “I almost knocked him over at the gate.” He meets Izuku’s gaze and Izuku gets the unspoken agreement there. *You don’t want me to talk about your brother so you’ll cover for me being sick, huh?* Izuku kind of hopes he’s reading into it too much. He has to remind himself that he’s spent more time with each of his classmates than they have with him--they don’t have all of those other resets in their memories.

“I don’t think you can get a fever from running, ribbit,” Tsuyu says, tipping her head slightly at Izuku. “Are you okay, Midoriya?” She meets Izuku’s gaze.

Izuku nods. “I-I really am,” he says, and he thinks it’s the truth. Even if his head hurts and his whole body feels tingly and painful and wrong, he’s okay. It’s not like he can *die* .

“Then he’s okay,” Tsuyu says, looking back at her notebook, where she’s making notes in the margins of a printed-out powerpoint. Izuku blinks, thankful for her trust. He leans down and starts to pull his own notes out of his backpack, both his current non-secret analysis notebook and his planner, since they tend not to actually do lessons during homeroom itself.

Aizawa steps into the classroom like he usually does, shuffling across the room without really picking up his feet, but Izuku doesn’t miss the way his gaze catches on Iida for a moment, doesn’t miss the way Iida gives the teacher a small smile and a nod. Aizawa looks away from him, but Izuku knows Aizawa well enough to know that there’s no way he’s letting it go.

“Alright, settle down,” he says, stepping behind his desk. The only people who are really talking are Kacchan’s friends, but they all quiet down quickly and turn to face the front of the room.

“Today we’ve got Hero Informatics class,” Aizawa says, scratching at his scar with a finger. Izuku blinks and looks down at his planner, and sure enough they do. He’d forgotten all about it.

“Do you think we’re going over legal shit again?” Kaminari whispers to Ashido a little too loudly. Aizawa’s eyes lazily shift to him.

“No, Kaminari,” he says, and Kaminari freezes with a little squeak. “Today, you’ll be picking your hero names.” He says it with a sigh, like he’s expecting the way the class erupts into noise at the reveal. Uraraka next to Izuku jumps out of her chair, cheering, but it takes everything Izuku has to not throw up, the noise and movement worsening his headache into a sharp pounding against the bones of his skull. He swallows, squeezing his hands into fists and ignoring the way his fingers prickle and ache at the movement. He feels a wave of intense gratitude for the way the class instantly starts to settle down when Aizawa’s hair starts to float, his narrowed eyes shining bright red for just a moment.

“Before that,” he says, his hair falling. “We need to discuss the pro draft picks from the sports festival. As you know, these picks are a way for the pros to express their interest in you and your future.” Aizawa glances over the class. “There’s still plenty of time for their interest to wane, and all offers can be revoked arbitrarily.”

“So even if we’re picked now, it doesn’t mean the future is going to be easy?” Hagakure asks, and it looks like she’s leaning forward on her desk, judging by the position of her clothes, although it’s hard to tell.

“Right,” Aizawa says, nodding. He clicks a button on his computer, and the projector fires on, displaying a series of names and bars on the blackboard. “Here are the picks. Usually the distribution is a bit different, but this year’s festival was unusual enough to skew things.” He taps on the board, but Izuku isn’t really listening any more.

The first name, up at the top, is Todoroki’s. He’s got over four thousand offers, and just below him, Kacchan has almost as much. Under him, a few of his classmates have offers. Izuku’s name is at the bottom of the list, with only three.

Izuku raises his hand even though Aizawa is talking. “Sensei,” he interrupts, voice high and unsteady. “Can I go to the restroom?” He asks, and Aizawa arches a brow at him.

“Wait until I’ve handed out the--” He starts, but Izuku doesn’t actually let him finish, getting up and walking to the door with his hands clenched into fists at his sides. He opens the door and steps out into the hallway, shutting it quietly behind him. The pressure of his hands on the door sends uncomfortable pins and needles through the pads of his fingers, but he ignores it, just like he’s ignoring the too-fast beating of his heart in his chest. *I need to get to the bathroom*, he thinks to himself, like a chant. *I just need to get to the bathroom.*

Izuku’s eyes are already full of hot tears, threatening to spill over when he pushes the door to the boy’s bathroom open, steps inside and marches into a stall. He locks it with shaking hands, then stands there, staring at his hand where it’s still on the latch, shaking. Izuku’s vision blurs as he starts to cry, tears stinging the sides of his face as his shoulders shake. He tries to take a breath in, but it hitches in his throat, making a horrible wet noise that Izuku tries to stifle by covering his mouth with his hands, tilting his head back to stare at the ceiling as he sobs.

I’m okay, he thinks, *this is okay*. He can’t get a full breath in without hiccupping, and his head is swimming, the tension from trying not to cry amplifying the horrible ache in his head, and he feels so *stupid* and *weak*. *This is why nobody wants me*, he realizes with a choked sob. *I’m not only quirkless, but I’m a stupid fucking crybaby who can’t even handle the truth*. He takes his left hand from his mouth, his right still stifling the tiny noises he’s making, and he digs the tips of his fingers into the spaces between his ribs, pressing painful bursts into the muscles of his sides. It’s grounding, and it helps, but Izuku just wants to rip his uniform off and cut lines into his arms and

thinking about that somehow makes it all worse.

Izuku has to shut his eyes against the wave of frustration and self hatred that washes over him, and his breath seizes altogether, stuttering and catching in his chest with a burst of pain that he thinks might be his heart breaking. *I'm never going to get over this*, he thinks. *I'm never going to be seen as anything more than quirkless*. *I'm never going to be a real hero*. He whimpers into his hand, the sound quiet around the rushing of his blood in his ears. He thinks he might throw up.

“Midoriya?” Todoroki’s voice is quiet, soft, and Izuku anyway. He hadn’t heard him come in, but now he can hear the soft tap of his shoes on the tile floor as he walks to the front of the stall Izuku is standing in, face wet with tears and one hand clamped over his mouth, the other wrapped around himself. Izuku tries to say something, but all that he manages to do is sob softly, the hiccuping noise echoing in the bathroom.

“Midoriya, open the door.” Todoroki’s voice is an order, not a request, and Izuku shakes his head anyway.

“N-No,” Izuku whimpers. “M okay, T-Todoroki.” His voice sounds like it’s been run through a blender and sewn back together with steel wool. He grips his ribs tighter. The pain in his muscles is weaker than the sensation of static in his hand.

“Open the door,” Todoroki says, voice firm, “or I’ll break it down.” Izuku knows he will, from experience, so he uncurls his hand from his mouth and unlatches the door before he can talk himself out of it. The metal lock makes a dull thunk as he slides it to the side, and the door swings outward, slightly. Izuku covers his mouth again with his hand, trying to stop his breathing from making those horrible catching noises, those stutters and breaks, as Todoroki yanks the door open.

There’s something about Todoroki’s face, about the desperate sort of worry and the way his brows are low and knitted together, the way he’s biting his bottom lip just the tiniest bit, that makes Izuku sob harder because *he’s worried about me and I don’t deserve it*. Todoroki seems to notice, because he puts a hand on Izuku’s shoulder and tugs him out of the cramped stall, into the main portion of the bathroom, pushing him forward until they’re by the sinks. Todoroki presses Izuku so that the back of his legs hit the edge of the counter, supporting him, then removes his hand from Izuku’s shoulder, instead looking at his face with an expression that holds something other than just worry. Izuku can’t place what that other emotion is.

“What is it with you and bathrooms?” Todoroki breathes, so quiet that Izuku doesn’t even know if he meant to say it, but something about it is funny to Izuku, just funny enough for him to snort out a small, wet laugh from behind his hand. He moves that hand down to hug at himself, wrapping it around him just like his other arm is, then asks,

“What do you mean?” his voice is shaking, both with tears and strange, unwanted laughter, but Todoroki’s gaze snaps back into focus and he blinks.

“I...” His brows furrow lower. “I don’t know.” He raises a hand up to touch his forehead, just like he’d done a few times during the sports festival. Izuku wonders if his head hurts.

“Are you okay?” He asks, before he can think better of it. Todoroki looks up at him, one brow raising slightly.

“You’re the one crying in the bathroom,” Todoroki points out, and Izuku flushes, his face going hot. He reaches up a hand to scrub away the tears still on his face, but he isn’t really crying any more.

“Only three,” he says, looking down at the floor, at his and Todoroki’s shoes. “I got second place, and I only got three offers.”

“I only got mine because of my father’s influence,” Todoroki says, and when Izuku looks up at him, there’s something gentle on his face. He doesn’t say anything else, just studies Izuku’s face as Izuku gathers his own thoughts.

“Are you...” Izuku swallows. “Your father is one of them, right?” He fidgets with his hands, fingers picking at each other.

Todoroki nods. “I’ll be accepting his offer, most likely.” He tips his head slightly. “You didn’t stay to see who your offers were from,” he says. Izuku shakes his head.

“I-I panicked,” he says, shifting his feet on the ground. “It shouldn’t have caught me off guard, but it did.”

“I think it’s foolish of hero agencies not to give you offers,” Todoroki says, and Izuku’s surprised to see him looking completely serious. “You managed to accomplish more without a quirk than most of us did with one. It shows a level of skill in both combat and strategy that’s impressive.” He looks at the ground. “I’m ashamed that I didn’t believe you when you said you would beat me.”

Izuku blinks. “R-Really?” He’s not used to hearing praise like this, not from someone who not long ago had been closed off and angry, refusing to engage with Izuku or anyone else.

Todoroki’s face flushes, just slightly. “Yes,” he answers, then takes a deep breath. “We should go back to class. I left without permission, as did you.”

Izuku starts. “You left without permission to follow me?”

Todoroki shrugs. “You... you looked like you could use a friend right then,” he says quietly, uncertainly, and Izuku *beams* .

“You were right,” Izuku says, and Todoroki’s eyes snap up to his, to the smile Izuku gives him, as watery as it is. Todoroki returns it with a small smile of his own, and Izuku feels that lonely, bitter pain in his chest fade ever-so-slightly.

--

Izuku walks into Gym Beta with his face already flushing red in embarrassment. Aizawa hadn’t chewed him out when he and Todoroki walked back into homeroom, but he *had* said they would talk later, and Izuku is sure that this, here, is the later he was talking about. Izuku sees Aizawa already in the gym, leaning against the wall with his hands folded over his chest and his eyes on Izuku, and Izuku sighs in resignation, his heart already beating faster in his chest.

“Problem child,” Aizawa greets him, and Izuku blinks at the nickname. “Have you had a chance to look at your draft offers?” He pushes himself off of the wall and starts to walk toward Izuku.

Izuku swallows nervously. “Um. Yeah.” He sets his backpack down on the metal bench near the water fountains and takes his hoodie off, laying it over the bench in the hopes that it’ll dry some. It’s still pouring outside, and even though it isn’t all that cold, Izuku is shivering in his sports uniform.

“Well?” Aizawa asks. Izuku looks at him where he stands, watching Izuku.

“You, um.” Izuku bites his lips. “You’ve read them?” He knows Aizawa has, of course, but he

needs to ask. Aizawa nods.

“I have,” he confirms. “Are you going to accept his offer?” He asks it like it isn’t a loaded question. Izuku drops his gaze to the mats that cover the floor here, padding it in case someone falls while sparring.

“Should I?” he asks instead of answering. “I-Isn’t he just... D-Doesn’t he just feel bad for me?” He toes his shoes off, his socks damp from the outside. He wrinkles his nose slightly at the way his toes prickle uncomfortably as he steps on the back of his socks to pull them off without having to use his hands. His toes are a deep purple, his feet pale, and he can only hope Aizawa doesn’t notice.

“I think you need to talk with him directly to determine that,” Aizawa says, voice careful. “But you also need to seriously consider if he has the time to carry out an internship while teaching here at UA.” Izuku straightens up, socks under the bench.

“I know about All Might’s time limit and his injury,” Izuku says, and Aizawa’s eyes widen slightly. He sighs, then rolls his eyes.

“Of course you do,” he says, under his breath, then looks at Izuku. “Then you should know his time limit now is down to less than an hour,” he says. “He uses all of that just teaching. Do you think that the internship with him would be worth it? Do you think that you’d be able to learn from him?” Izuku stares back at his teacher for a moment.

“I... I should still talk to All Might first, even if just to turn him down,” Izuku says, looking to the ground. “But I think you’re right, Aizawa-sensei. I just...” He looks back up at his teacher, embarrassed at the way tears have started to prickle at the corners of his eyes. “Why only three?” His voice cracks ever so slightly, and Aizawa sighs, his gaze softening. He steps forward, setting a gentle head on Izuku’s head, compressing the curls there.

“Because, problem child, the world is still learning.” He takes a slow breath. “Keep in mind that two of your offers were from the top ten. That means more than the total number of offers you received.”

“R-Right!” Izuku says, a smile creeping up onto his face. “D-Do you think that the other one--”

“You wouldn’t have gotten that offer if it wasn’t serious,” Aizawa says before Izuku can finish his thought, can ask if it might have been out of pity or for publicity. Aizawa frowns, suddenly, then drops his hand to rest on Izuku’s forehead.

“Midoriya, why are you running a fever?” Aizawa asks, his eyes narrowing, and Izuku smiles nervously, feeling his face turn red as he looks to the side. *I’m caught.*

“Um, n-no reason!” he squeaks, and Aizawa raises an eyebrow at him very, very slowly. “I-I’m not sick, I swear!” He takes a step back, trying to put some distance between them. Aizawa takes a deep breath, shutting his eyes as he breathes out through his nose.

“What is the *one thing* I have tried to impress on you about training, since the beginning?” Aizawa asks, glaring at Izuku.

“Always try my best?” Izuku tries, and Aizawa’s eyes flash red for just a second.

“No,” Aizawa says, growling. “It’s that you need to *tell someone* if you’re injured or sick. It’s that hero work is *dangerous* and knowing your own limits is *vital*.” He brings a hand up to his temples, grimacing like he’s trying to hold himself back from strangling Izuku. “You’re going to give me

early grey hairs, Midoriya.”

Izuku wraps his arms around himself. “S-Sorry?” he offers, looking up at his teacher. Aizawa just sighs, rolling his eyes.

“Don’t apologize, just *tell me* next time. You’re not going to get over whatever bug you have if you keep training with it.” He pulls his phone out, glancing at it. “Recovery Girl should still be here. She can’t use her quirk to cure illnesses, but she’s still a doctor.” He sticks his phone back in his pocket. “Come on. I’ll walk you over.”

Izuku blinks. “O-Oh, you don’t need to, I--” Aizawa cuts him off.

“If I let you go on your own, you’d probably end up skipping Recovery Girl’s office and training in the other gym,” Aizawa drawls, then glances at Izuku’s shoes and socks. “Put those back on. I’m going to go get my umbrella from the back.” He waits to leave until Izuku sits on the bench and reaches under, grabbing his socks. Izuku watches his teacher walk over in the direction of the locker rooms, not sure of what to think.

--

After classes the next day, Izuku stands outside the teacher’s lounge, his hands shaking a little as he pushes the door open, the handle cool under his skin. He steps inside and Midnight looks up at him, smiling before going back to her work.

“Aizawa’s in the back,” she says. Izuku’s not shocked; he comes here about once or twice a week to eat lunch. He’s not here to talk to Aizawa, though.

“Actually, um.” Izuku shifts nervously when Midnight looks back up at him, a curious look on her face. “Is All Might here?”

Midnight blinks, then gives an apologetic smile. “Ah, sorry kid, but he’s--” Izuku interrupts her.

“I-I know about his other form,” he says, and Midnight starts at that.

“Oh, you do?” She smiles. “He’s in his own office, on the far left side of this room. The door should say Yagi on it. Knock first, since he keeps it locked.” She glances down at her papers, but the smile stays on her lips. “By the way, congratulations on second place. You did amazing.” Izuku squeaks out a mumbled and incoherent thank you, his face turning red. He scrambles past her as she giggles at him, walking quickly to the side of the room that she’d directed him to.

All Might’s office door is plain except for the yellow curtain on the other side of the small window, blocking Izuku from seeing inside but letting enough light through to show that the lights are on in the small room. The nameplate beside the doorway reads Toshinori Yagi. Izuku swallows and raps on the door. He hears a small commotion from inside, then the door handle makes a clicking noise before the door opens inward, All Might’s skeletal face peeking out. All Might blinks, then smiles, opening the door.

“Midoriya,” he says, gesturing for Izuku to walk inside. “I’d been wondering if I’d be hearing from you soon, my boy.” Izuku blinks at the room, a plain office with a yellow couch in the back of the room. A boy with big eyes and yellow-blond hair grins back at him from where he’s seated on the couch. There’s also a desk with a cushy office chair that’s pointed toward the couch. Izuku blinks as the pieces fit together.

“Oh! A-All Might, if you were in the middle of something, I-I can come back,” he says, his voice catching in his throat. All Might simply shakes his head.

“No, no. Young Mirio and I were just chitchatting, nothing important,” All Might answers, and Mirio or whoever nods, smiling and standing up from the couch.

“I’m Mirio Toogata,” he says, offering Izuku a hand. “I have a feeling I’ll be seeing a lot more of you.” Izuku swallows nervously and shakes his hand. He has no idea what *that* means, but he doesn’t sense any malice coming from Toogata, so he supposes it’s okay.

“I’ll see you later, sensei,” Toogata says, stepping out of the office with a small wave. All Might nods to him, and the older student steps out of the room, the door clicking shut behind him. Izuku swallows, shifting uncomfortably as All Might looks over him.

“Have a seat,” All Might says, waving at the couch as he lowers himself into his office chair. “How have you been? I’d heard that you were ill after the sports festival.” Izuku bites his lip and sits on the couch, feeling awkward.

“Um, I-I’m feeling much better,” he answers, and it’s partially true. After another night of rest, the tingling in his fingers and toes has faded into a dull numbness, and he’s not throwing up blood any more, just his meals. He’s still got a fever, but according to the thermometer he’d borrowed from his mom, it’s gone down a little. He feels a lot more awake, a lot steadier.

“Good, good,” All Might nods approvingly, and Izuku feels himself start to turn red because even if he looks different, this is *still All Might*, the number one hero. Izuku’s idol, his favorite hero since he was a kid. Even though right now, not that he’d admit it out loud, his favorite hero is probably Eraserhead, Izuku has still spent most of his life fanboying over All Might, and now he’s in the man’s office receiving concern and praise. Izuku thinks he might spontaneously combust.

“Now,” All Might says, leaning forward to rest his elbows on his knees and his chin on his hands. “What can I do for you?”

Izuku swallows, takes a steadying breath. “I-I’d like to ask you about your offer.” He forces himself to meet All Might’s blue eyes. “Y-Your internship offer.”

All Might nods, not looking surprised. “What questions do you have about it?”

“Are you offering because you mean it,” Izuku asks, hating himself for saying the words, “or because you feel bad for telling me I couldn’t be a hero, back then?” He watches as All Might blinks, then sighs, straightening up and dropping his hands into his lap.

“It’s not out of pity, if that’s what you’re asking,” All Might says, his gaze on the floor. “And though I do feel guilty for that, it’s not the only reason I’d sent the offer. No, I was genuinely impressed by your performance.” Izuku bites his lip, letting a little bubble of hope rise in his chest, just barely.

“But,” All Might says, looking up to meet Izuku’s gaze. “If you are considering the offer--no, even if you aren’t--there’s something I should tell you.” Izuku swallows, takes in the serious look on his face. “I was once quirkless, too, young Midoriya.”

“What?” Izuku asks, barely more than a startled gasp. He can’t tear his eyes away from the man’s face, even as he feels his jaw dropping.

All Might nods. “I was a late bloomer,” he says, dropping his gaze to look at his hand as he holds it in front of him. “My quirk didn’t manifest until I was fourteen years old. In my time, quirklessness was a lot more common, so I’m sure I had an easier time of it than you did, but...” He closes his hand into a fist. “It was wrong of me to dismiss you like that. I know what it’s like to be told you

are nothing because you don't have a quirk. I suppose some part of me, deep down, still believed that it was true." He looks back up at Izuku, a serious set to his face. "Midoriya, you have proved me wrong. I have no doubt in my mind now that you will be the first quirkless hero."

Izuku opens his mouth to reply, but he can't say anything. He can't stop himself when he throws himself at All Might, wrapping his arms around the man's bony frame and burying his face in All Might's shoulder as he starts to cry. He feels All Might lowly relax underneath him, gently setting a hand on his back and giving him a few awkward pats.

"Midoriya..?" he asks, hesitant. "Are you alright, my boy?" He sounds concerned.

"Y-Yeah," Izuku says, pulling away from him, embarrassed. "I-I'm sorry, I just--you have no idea how much that means to me," he says, wiping tears away from his eyes and sitting back down on the couch. *All Might is like me. All Might is like me, he didn't get his quirk until fourteen, same as me. My hero is like me!*

All Might smiles, his teeth shining. "I think I can make a good guess," he says, his eyes crinkling with his grin. "Now, about the internship, are you--"

Izuku shakes his head, cutting All Might off. "I-I'd love to, but..." He glances at the ground. "Do you really have time for that?" he asks, voice small. "Aizawa-sensei told me your limit has dropped to an hour a day."

All Might sighs. "Yes, it has. And you're right, I suppose. I don't have time to give you the internship you deserve." When Izuku glances up, he looks a little embarrassed. "To tell you the truth, I expected you to say no. I actually have a different offer for you, if you're willing." Izuku blinks.

"What is it?" He asks, tipping his head slightly to the side.

"I have been training Mirio on the side," All Might explains. "He suddenly and unexpectedly manifested a second quirk, one that is completely different from his first one, but is... similar, in a few ways, to mine." Izuku blinks. "I would like to ask you if you would be interested in joining a few of our training sessions, perhaps once or twice a week," All Might says, holding his hands out with his palms open. "I could also write you a workout and diet plan, if it would be useful to you. I've noticed that you're in better shape than when we met on that rooftop, but there's always room for improvement."

Izuku is nodding furiously before All Might even finishes speaking. "Yes!" he chirps, his voice an excited squeak. "Yes, All Might, please that would be *so* amazing! You're like, my favorite hero and I can't believe that you'd really do that for me, and oh god you're like me, or you were anyway, and--" All Might laughs, a bright chuckle, and Izuku cuts himself off, his face flushing.

"I'm glad to hear it, Young Midoriya. You can call me Yagi in this form, by the way. It'll help keep me undercover," he says, winking, and Izuku nods.

"Yes sir, Yagi-sensei!" Izuku smiles, the motion stretching his cheeks. "Can I ask you for advice on something?"

All Might nods, smiling. "Of course! What is it?" Izuku reaches into his backpack, fishing around for his draft letter. He pulls out the paper, neatly folded in its envelope, and takes it out, pressing out the creases before he passes it to All Might.

"Um, other than you, I only actually got t-two offers," Izuku says, biting at his lower lip. "One of

them is, well... You and one of them are from the top ten, so I was thinking if not you, I'd take that offer." All Might hums thoughtfully, then looks up at Izuku.

"You should accept that one, my boy," All Might says with a smile. "I think it speaks to how impressive your performance at the festival was that you were given this offer at all." He hands the piece of paper back to Izuku. "You have a few days to think on it if you need, and I'd suggest asking Aizawa since he has been your mentor all this time, but I think it'd be an excellent fit for you."

Izuku grins brightly, taking the paper and staring down at the offers. There's All Might's, one from a small agency that focused on inclusiveness and diversity, and... the one he'll be accepting. Izuku folds the paper up neatly, just like it was before, and slides it into the envelope before tucking it into his backpack.

"Thank you, Yagi-sensei," he says, something happy and warm swelling in his voice.

"Of course, my boy," All Might replies, his eyes crinkling around the edges. "Will Sunday afternoon work for you? For training," he clarifies. Izuku nods quickly.

"Yes!" He tightens his hands into fists to stop himself from jumping up and down in excitement.

All Might chuckles. "Good. I'll see you at gym gamma, then. I'll have Mirio text you the details," he says, and Izuku thinks he might just explode from joy. The entire walk to the train station, he skips rather than walks, his chest bubbling with happiness that he doesn't think he's ever really felt before.

Chapter End Notes

inb4 "what about tensei" shhh im getting to that keep in mind that iida in canon tries to brush it off as well

ANYWAY i hope u enjoyed!! and yes writing fluff makes me cry esp bc izuku so badly needs love and care

thank you for all da support!!! it means the WORLD to me

customary discord link: <https://discord.gg/Vqaj62ceCt>

before the internships

Chapter Summary

last time: izuku got a badly needed hug from all might, who he'll start training with soon!

Chapter Notes

HI FOLKS im gonna be moving into the dorm tomorrow so there mayyy not be an update but i will still try to get one out! i hope you enjoy this <3

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“Oh yeah,” Kirishima says, turning to look at Izuku where he’s putting on his sneakers. “You didn’t ever pick a hero name, did you?” Kirishima is half naked, his sports uniform pants on but nothing covering his bare chest. Izuku’s already changed, going to the bathroom stalls in the locker room when he’d done it. The boy’s locker room now is filled with class 1-A, everyone in varying states of dress and undress. Izuku always feels a little awkward about not actually changing in front of the others, but he’s certainly not the only one. Todoroki, Aoyama, and Shouji all change in private as well, so at least he’s not alone.

“Hey, earth to Midoriya!” Kirishima says, grinning and waving a hand in front of Izuku’s face. “You started mumbling again, bro.” Izuku feels his face heat slightly in embarrassment.

“O-Oh, sorry,” he says, looking back at his shoes to tie the laces. “What did you ask?”

“I was wondering if you’d picked a hero name, since you were sick when we picked them in class,” Kirishima explains. “You’re sure you feel better? You looked like you were gonna puke, man, and I dunno about you but I hate working out if I don’t feel my best.”

Izuku nods. “I-I’m okay now,” he says, putting his feet on the floor of the locker room and standing up, stretching. “I have a name in mind, actually,” he tells Kirishima, looking over as Kirishima tugs his sports top on, ruffling his gelled hair. He’s glad that his classmates had all just assumed he was sick the other day. Neither Aizawa nor Todoroki had corrected them, thank goodness. Izuku isn’t sure he’d be able to explain why he went to cry in the bathroom of all things.

“Really?” Kirishima grins at him. “Let’s hear it!” Izuku glances around and sees Kaminari and Sero are both obviously listening. Kacchan is off to the side, already dressed, sitting on the edge of a bench pointedly not looking at them. Izuku is sure he’s listening.

“Um, I was thinking that I’d just go with Deku, actually,” Izuku says, looking down at the ground. He can see the edges of the lockers in his vision, a grey that’s two shader bluer than that of the floor.

“Isn’t that like... a mean nickname?” Kaminari asks, and when Izuku looks up at him his head is tipped slightly to the side.

"I-It was," Izuku admits, fidgeting with his hands. "But, um, I think I'm going to use it to mean more like the Deku that can do anything, you know?" He smiles a little bit. "I think it's nice to make it my own." He hears Kacchan snort as he stands up and stomps out of the locker room, not even looking at Izuku.

"Hey, that's super manly, though," Kirishima says, grinning. "I like it. Didya hear mine yet?"

Izuku shakes his head. "I haven't heard any of them," he answers. "Well, except for Uraraka's and Tsuyu's," he corrects, since they'd told him at lunch that day.

"C'mon, we're going to be late," Sero says, jerking a finger towards the door that leads to the gym. "We can tell him while we're working out." Kirishima and Kaminari both nod, and Izuku does, too. Sero goes first, heading out the way Kacchan went, with the rest of them trailing behind him as they walk out into Gym Beta.

"Mine's Taping Hero, Cellophane," Sero says, glancing back at Izuku as they walk out onto the mats. "It's pretty simple, really." Izuku nods.

"It fits, and it works with your surname too!" He chirps in reply, and Sero beams a smile at him.

"Yours is a pun on your given name," Sero says, grinning. "We're kind of twinning, aren't we?" Izuku spots Ashido walking over to them before she speaks, a grin on her face.

"Oh, what are you guys twinning with?" Ashido asks, her hair clipped up out of her face with matching blue hair pins. "Are we finally getting to know Midoriya's hero name?"

"Yeah, it's--" Kaminari starts, but Kirishima elbows him, cutting him off.

"Dude," he hisses, "let Midoriya tell her!" Kirishima looks at Izuku expectantly. Actually, they're all looking at him. Izuku feels his face start to flush again.

"Um, it's Deku," he says nervously, but he feels better when Ashido grins at him.

"Nice! I was gonna pick Alien Queen, but I went with Pinky instead since Midnight said no to the first one," Ashido says, resting one hand on her hip. "Have the boys all told you theirs yet?"

"Just me," Sero says. "I think he's really gonna like Kirishima's, though."

"Wait," Kaminari says. "Let me say mine first, otherwise they're going to be fanboying and I won't get a chance." His voice has a bit of a whining tone to it, but Izuku thinks it's joking. "I'm going with Chargebolt!"

"That's super cool!" Izuku says, nodding. Kaminari looks pleased with himself. Kirishima grins from next to him.

"Okay, so," he starts, looking at Izuku, "I'm gonna go with Red Riot." He pauses, and Izuku blinks.

"O-Oh," he says, a smile forming on his face. "Like Crimson--"

"Yeah!" Kirishima says, bouncing on his feet. "I knew he'd get it! Like Crimson Riot, since he's like my favorite hero of all time." He turns to walk backwards as they head into the main part of the gym, where Aizawa is waiting for them, looking bored.

"I'm surprised," Izuku says to him. "He's not as well known as a lot of other heroes, even though

he's super cool." Kirishima nods, still grinning wide.

"Yeah, I like his whole manly spirit thing!" Kirishima says, flexing one arm. Sero snorts.

"Yeah, we could tell from the fact that you use 'manly' to describe everything you like," Sero says, rolling his eyes with a grin. "Even if it's something that definitely can't be literally manly." Kirishima pouts, still walking backwards.

"Aw, man, I've explained this to you already! It's less about being manly like that and more about like, living your life without regrets and not letting your fears control you," Kirishima grins, looking at Izuku. "Like how Midoriya fought in the Sports Festival! Like, talk about not being afraid. He walked right through Todoroki's fire and then *bit* Bakubro, like *dude*," Kirishima mimes chomping at the air, and Sero bursts out in laughter, copying the motion.

"You should make your hero name the chomper or something," Sero says, elbowing Izuku. "You really like biting people, huh?" Izuku flushes red, knowing that he's bitten Sero, too, even if Sero doesn't remember.

"I-It's a good tactic!" He says, watching Kirishima giggle and Sero mime wiping tears away from his eyes. "It surprises people, a-and it works!"

"Yeah," Kaminari says, a grin on his face. "I don't see you trying that move on me any time soon," he snickers. "You'd get *fried*!"

"Well," Ashido cuts in, "Midoriya's already proven he doesn't care if he gets hurt in battle. We all saw him walk like, *directly* through literal fire to punch Todoroki in the face." She's grinning, looking at Izuku.

"It was fucking stupid," Kacchan says, and Izuku whips his head to the side, where Kacchan is standing with his arms folded over his chest and a scowl on his face. "What the fuck would he have done if he hadn't gotten lucky with his punch?" Izuku blinks.

"I-I..." Izuku can't exactly say, *probably killed myself, considering that's what I did all the times I didn't win*, or, *I actually knew sort of how the battle would go, since it wasn't my first one*, and he also can't say *I'm immune to dying, so getting hurt isn't the same for me*. Instead, he just stares at Kacchan, trying to form words with his mouth.

"Bakugou is right," Aizawa says, stepping forward and putting a hand on Kirishima's shoulder to stop him from walking backward directly into a cable machine. "That tactic would not have worked well in battle with a real villain." His gaze slides over to Izuku, who gives him a sheepish smile. "Recklessness will get you killed if you're not careful," he says, and Izuku can see Ashido and Kirishima pouting out of the corner of his eyes, but he's more focused on Aizawa's slightly narrowed eyes.

"R-Right," Izuku says, dropping his gaze to the floor. The gym is silent for a second, before Todoroki's voice pipes up.

"I don't think Midoriya was as reckless as he appeared," Todoroki says, and when Izuku looks at him, his head is tipped to the side thoughtfully. "He knew my fighting style well, and he seemed aware of the limitations of my quirk. I had assumed he had known I was weakened and that his punch would be sufficient to knock me out." Todoroki looks over at Aizawa. "I'm sure you noticed the way he was reading my moves. Is that something you taught him to do?"

Aizawa raises an eyebrow. "It isn't," he says, then slides his gaze over to Izuku. "Midoriya *is* good

at reading his opponents,” he says, something underlying his voice, “but that doesn’t mean he isn’t also reckless.” Izuku shuffles uneasily under his gaze.

“If Midoriya was reckless, I was just foolish,” Yaoyorozu says, sighing and holding up her hand. There’s not even a scar, but Izuku remembers where the deep cut had been. He shivers thinking about it as she looks at the back of her hand, and Aizawa sighs.

“You’re all still learning,” he says. “I don’t expect you to have perfect sense in your first year.” He turns, putting a hand on the cable machine. “Now, for class today, All Might is busy so I’ll be supervising while you work out. I’ve been told you all already have assigned plans, but if you need a spot or someone to show you proper form, I’ll be around.” He glances at Izuku briefly. “You can all get started,” he says. “Midoriya, I’d like a word with you first.” Izuku swallows nervously as his classmates look at him, then start to disperse. Kirishima walks past him, setting a hand on his upper arm as he does.

“Good luck, dude,” he whispers with a comforting smile, and Izuku does his best to return it. He watches Kirishima’s back as the boy walks over to a squat rack. Izuku can feel his heart start to flutter in his chest, but he does his best to squash his nerves. He glances back over to Aizawa, only to see Kacchan in the background, clearly watching from where he’s doing aggressive bicep curls. He’s glaring at Izuku, red eyes glued to Izuku’s face. Izuku forces himself to take a deep breath.

Aizawa looks at him, then sighs. “No, you’re not in trouble,” he says, folding his arms over his chest. “I wanted to ask how you’re feeling. Are you still running a fever?” Izuku blinks.

“I-I don’t think so,” he says, shrugging. “I feel better, though...” It’s true, anyway. He doesn’t even have the headache, which he’d been starting to think might be permanent. It had finally started to fade last night, when he’d laid down to sleep. The nausea had gone away a couple of days ago, and with it the stomach pain. Now, the only thing that lingers is a slight fatigue, a little lingering exhaustion that really only hits him at the end of the day. It’s something he might not even notice if he wasn’t looking for it.

“Good,” Aizawa says, looking him over. “Will you tell me if you start to feel ill again?” he asks, tapping his fingers against his arm and giving Izuku a serious look.

Izuku nods, swallowing. “I-I’ll try,” he says, and it seems to be good enough for his teacher, because Aizawa nods and lets him go work out with the rest of the class.

--

The street is cool and silent when Izuku finally, finally feels well enough to go out again. He’d wanted to go out as Ace anyway, but he’d decided the risk of someone--Aizawa--noticing his illness and connecting the dots was too high. It’s later than he’d normally go, too, but only because he’d been watching the recordings from the second and third years sports festivals and had lost track of time.

The rain has finally stopped, but the ground is still cool and wet, the air scented like ozone and damp earth. It’s a humid night, Izuku’s breath catching on the dampened fabric of his mask when he breathes in, but he doesn’t mind it. It’s just nice to be out on the streets as Ace again, after an entire week off. He’s in his usual area for the night, the soft noises of the city soaking into his bones.

As he walks along a rooftop, the shingles damp and slick under his scuffed up boots, he listens. He can hear the sounds of singing and dancing, the deep thud of bass notes leaking out from buildings, the occasional honk of a car horn. Under that, he can hear the soft chirping of crickets and cicadas,

lurking in the grasses that sneak up between the concrete, living in the islands of grass and trees and landscaping among the asphalt and the brick. Izuku loves it here.

He slips back into his usual rhythm easily, hopping along rooftops and sliding down fire escapes when he needs to cross along the ground. He stops a couple of fights before they even really begin; some of the locals here recognize him on sight, now, and they know better than to try and brawl with him right there. It's satisfying, when he hops down between two tall men that often fight each other when they both go out for smoke breaks. The skinnier one, a man with long black hair he wears in a bun, lets out a long suffering sigh.

"God, Ace, I thought you'd finally got caught sneaking out of your daddy's house or something. Don't you have anything better to do?" He asks, snuffing out his cigarette on the wet brick of the nightclub he and his friend often frequented. "We're not gonna fight, go bother someone else."

His companion, a heavier man with red hair and European features, snarls at him. "Didya decide that all on your own, then? I'm not backing down just because the kid showed up." He glares at Izuku with green eyes. "I'm gonna bash his stupid head in if he says that bullshit one more time."

Izuku raises his hands in a placating gesture. "Can't you two just talk it out with words?" he asks, not for the first time. "I get that it's very important to you, but--"

"Edgeshot is the best hero and he *fucking knows it*!" The redhead snarls, grabbing the front of his friend's shirt, tugging him up. The other man just looks bored.

"I've told you a thousand times that Ryuukyuu is simply superior," he says, shrugging. "You're just bitter that you're wrong."

Izuku sighs, pulling out one of his knives. "Do I really need to intervene *again*?" he asks, holding the knife up so the light of the building's windows glints off of it. "Last time you two fought you caused *three* car accidents. You really, really shouldn't fight when neither of you can control your quirks." It's kind of fun, scolding them, especially when the redhead drops his friend and groans dramatically.

"Fine! You win, pipsqueak." He looks over to Izuku, glaring. "I'll have you know I can control my quirk just fine when I'm sober."

"Me too," the other one chimes in, looking put out. "And it's really not my fault that people can't drive in heavy fog. That's like, a totally reasonable weather condition. They should know how to do it." He pouts, and Izuku rolls his eyes, moving his head with the motion so that the two men can tell he's doing it even with the goggles.

"Then beat each other up sober?" he suggests, and the redhead opens his mouth to reply, but Izuku interrupts. "Sorry guys, but I want to stop some actual villains tonight," he says, sheathing his knife. "You'll behave?"

"Yeah, I guess," the skinnier one says, huffing out a heavy sigh. "I can't believe we take orders from a middle schooler."

"Hey!" Izuku protests as he starts climbing the fire escape. "I'm in high school!"

"That's what a middle schooler would say!" One of them calls up at him before they dissolve into giggles. Izuku smiles behind his mask as he climbs back onto the roof, the movements instinctual at this point. He can hear them bickering as he runs along the roof, but he doesn't hear any actual fighting, so he'll take it. He starts off along the rooftops, headed toward the edge of his usual patrol

route. He's almost halfway done with the normal path, and the moon is high in the sky, a thin silver claw nestled among the stars.

Izuku sees them before he hears them, skittering to a halt on a flat, concrete rooftop. There's a break between buildings here, but no actual alley or street leading to the tiny, rectangular space, so the gap is pretty much inaccessible, and Izuku's gotten used to seeing it on his path. What he hasn't seen before, though, is two women standing in the gap, talking to each other.

One of them is Leadfoot, who Izuku recognizes immediately. She's in her customary outfit, although the shirt under her suit jacket is a different color than usual, a pale lavender. She's standing with her hands on her hips and an annoyed twist to her mouth as the woman in front of her babbles incoherently. The other woman has red hair, bright blood red like Kirishima's, and it's up in high pigtails that fall to just below her shoulders. She'd dressed somewhat like Leadfoot, with a grey suit jacket and a pink dress shirt underneath, but her jacket is unbuttoned and she isn't wearing a tie. Instead of slacks, she's wearing what looks like a school uniform skirt, the same shade of grey as her jacket, and a pair of knee high socks that are striped pink and white. Even with only a thin strip of her thighs showing between the socks and skirt, Izuku can see countless cuts on her legs, parallel horizontal marks that he knows all too well. In one hand, she's holding a metal baseball bat that's scuffed and dented in places.

Izuku swallows down a swell of something strange as he presses himself to the roof, just barely peeking over to watch them. The red haired girl looks younger than Leadfoot, but that may just be because she doesn't wear a mask. Her eyes are bright amber, almost glowing in the light, and they look strange. Izuku frowns, squinting to see, and he thinks her pupils might not be the usual shape, but he can't tell, not from this distance. *Her quirk?*

"Can you *please* shut up," Leadfoot says, huffing and folding her arms over her chest. "I don't even know why you asked to meet with me, if you're like this. Have you even been out on a mission today?"

The other girl hums, swinging her arms back and forth at her side. "Nope! But I got bored, so I went clubbing," she says, voice sing-song. There's a thin white scar on the side of her cheek, Izuku notices, bent by the wide smile on her face.

"That's..." Leadfoot raises a hand like she's going to massage between her eyes, but stops when she touches her mask, dropping the hand. "You're too irresponsible. I've already told you that Eraserhead and Nighteye are onto us. I don't need you getting caught because you wanted to party or whatever."

The younger girl hums. "It's more about the drugs, you know that!" She says, giggling. Izuku thinks it makes sense that she's high, given the way she's fidgeting, moving strangely.

"I really, really do not understand why you need to do drugs, considering..." She trails off, shaking her head. "Whatever. What did you need me for, exactly?"

"I have a lead!" The girl chirps, leaning forward and grabbing onto Leadfoot's upper arm, her fingers crinkling the fabric. "Oh, or should I say a *lead*," she says it like the metal, "get it? Because of your quirk?"

Leadfoot sighs, audible even to Izuku. "Yes, thank you Manami, I get it." She swats at Manami, and the younger girl hops back easily, giggling. "What's the lead?"

"Shiggy is gonna meet with the diplomatic team soon, hm?" She says, spinning in a slow circle, head tipped up to the sky. Izuku ducks back to avoid being spotted.

“I know that. I’m *on* that team,” Leadfoot says, sounding annoyed. Izuku hides behind the raised edge of the roof, not willing to peek over again just yet.

“Yeah, but didya know that I’m getting a special mission if it goes as planned?” Manami asks, laughter distorting her voice. “They want me to talk to that other guy.”

“That’s the stupidest idea I’ve ever heard,” Leadfoot says, sounding incredulous. “You can’t even do recon without touching people. You used your quirk on four people last time we sent you to get *groceries*, for crying out loud. They want *you* to negotiate with a third party?”

“It’s because I’m still a well-kept secret, silly!” Manami sings, and Izuku looks over just in time to see her reach for Leadfoot’s face. Leadfoot slaps her hand away.

“You *are*, but it won’t take long for the police to piece that shit together if you get caught using your stupid quirk on even one person.” Leadfoot groans, resting her masked face in her hands. “Your brother is such a fucking idiot, Manami. He’s going to get us all killed by a bunch of freaks.”

“At least it won’t be by the cops!” Manami replies, giggling. “That’s not the lead I had, anyway, that’s just new.” Leadfoot pulls her face out of her hands, folding her arms over her chest. Manami taps the baseball bat against the ground, making a faint metallic noise.

“Are you planning on getting to the point before morning? I have work,” she says, voice full of irritation. Izuku wonders if she has a day job, or if there’s a mission she’s on. He couldn’t follow her, anyway, he has class.

“Your little angel is going to be on a mission soon,” Manami says, and Izuku sees the way Leadfoot stiffens. “It’s a lead I’m supposed to keep secret from you, by the way. She’ll be there, on my brother’s mission. I think she’s spying on us, or something. Her boss might be there, too, but he’s a little too smart for us to catch.” She grins, raising a hand to cover her mouth, giggling. “I’m so excited! It’s gonna make big brother so *happy*!”

“Of course it is,” Leadfoot mumbles, her voice hard for Izuku to make out.

“Aw, don’t look so down,” Manami coos, reaching for Leadfoot’s face again. Leadfoot slaps her at the wrist, knocking her hand away.

“Manami,” she says, warning clear in her voice.

“Sorry!” Manami says, although she doesn’t sound very sorry. “I’m just saying, you’ll get to spend more time with her this way, yeah?” She grins, showing too many teeth. “Maybe she’ll even cooperate!”

“I doubt it,” Leadfoot sighs, kicking at the ground with her boots. “We need to make ourselves scarce,” she says, and Izuku freezes, waiting for her to point him out or look at him or show any sign of seeing him, but she doesn’t.

“Mmhm,” Manami agrees, humming. “I’ll see you tonight?” She asks, tipping her head slightly to the side.

“Kazuo has me tonight,” Leadfoot says, frowning.

“Oh, well, tomorrow then,” Manami says, shrugging. Leadfoot nods, then bends at the knees slightly. Izuku watches as she rises off of the ground, hovering in midair. She’s standing strangely, like she’s balancing, and Izuku swears he sees a faint violet glimmer on the metal of her boots and the bands that have wrapped around her. He scoots back, pressing himself to the concrete and

praying she doesn't look his way as she rises out from the small space between the buildings, floating.

Mercifully, she doesn't even glance his way, instead floating away, hands spread slightly at her sides. Izuku can see a faint glow on her rings, too, and something prickles in the back of his mind, but he can't place it. Regardless, he's got a pretty good guess as to what her quirk is as he watches her fade into the distance.

In his fascination, he almost misses when Manami climbs up, her head poking up above the edge of his roof to look straight at him. She blinks, tipping her head to the side, then grins. Izuku can see her pupils, nestled in orange irises, are shaped like tiny hearts.

"Aww, we have a little fan," she whispers, hauling herself up onto the roof. Izuku swallows, pulling himself to his feet as she does, settling into a fighting stance. His heart is pumping adrenaline through his body, and his hands are shaking where he grabs for his knives on his belt.

"I want to get home, so I'll make this quick," she says, running her tongue over her teeth and stepping forward. She lifts the baseball bat and grins wide, her gaze on him clearly predatory. "Do you have a preference?"

"What?" Izuku asks, blinking as she steps forward, swinging the bat at him in a wide swipe that he dodges easily.

"Of how I kill, you, silly!" She says, giggling and swinging the baseball bat again. "I can make it a head injury, or I can crush your ribs in. Ooh, if you're willing to wait a little, I can even strangle you," She nods, bouncing the baseball bat on the palm of the hand she's not holding it in. "It's really up to you."

Izuku squints, then tips his head slightly to the side. "Is it fine if I do it myself?" he asks, half joking. She raises both her eyebrows.

"Sure, I guess," she says, a surprised laugh in her voice. "I'm just confidential, you know?" She steps towards him. "How are you going to do it? Are you gonna jump?" She waves to the roof behind him. "It's not really high enough, you know."

"I know," Izuku replies, then drives his knife into the meat of his arm, slicing through the fabric of his costume. The blood comes out quickly, fueled by the adrenaline fast filling him. Manami's eyes go wide, and her mouth drops.

"Whoa, I didn't expect you to actually do it," she says, blinking. "You're pretty crazy, kid." She steps toward Izuku as he switches hands, cutting a matching line in the other arm. "Let me help," she coos, then raises the baseball bat above her head. Izuku barely has time to glance up before she slams it down onto his head.

--

The next day in class, Izuku doesn't even have a headache. He's grateful for that; he'd been nervous that his reset threshold would be lower after being sick. He'd reset to right after stopping the fight between his two usual problems, so it wasn't difficult for him to just... take a different route and avoid Leadfoot and Manami altogether. He'd cut the patrol short, trying instead to find Eraserhead, with no luck. It's annoying, being in class now and having Aizawa asleep at the front of the classroom, but not being able to give him the information he has.

Izuku's doodling idly in his notebook, touching up one of his drawings of Present Mic. He'd

started it before the sports festival and gotten distracted with training, but at this point it's pretty much done. He's really only adding a few small details, like tiny hints of stubble on the parts of Mic-sensei's face that he shaves, texture to the irises of his eyes. He's kind of proud of this one, honestly. Maybe he'll give it to his mom to keep at work. She's already got a bunch of his of All Might, and it'd be nice to give her some variety.

"Hey Deku, whatcha doing?" Izuku blinks up at the sound of Uraraka's voice. She's leaning over in her desk, looking at him curiously.

"Just drawing," he says, closing the notebook. "I've already done the homeworks.." She nods, not looking surprised.

"Me too! Tsuyu helped me out yesterday, since we weren't expecting to have study hall today," she says, smiling. "I've been meaning to ask, who did you end up picking for your internship? You never said."

Izuku blinks, glancing down at his desk. "I haven't? I thought I'd at least mentioned it..." He traces his fingers along the metal spiral that binds his notebook together at the seams.

"No, you were sick on that first day and didn't know yet during homeroom the other day and then people keep getting distracted any time anyone asks!" She says, sighing. "I've been *dying* to know. All I know for sure is that it isn't Gunhead, since he said I'm the only intern at his place."

"I'm a bit curious, as well," Todoroki says from where he's seated a little bit away, looking over at them with a calm expression. Izuku blinks, fidgeting with his hands.

"Well, um, I only got three offers, and one of them wasn't... it wasn't like, a real offer, y'know?" He swallows. "And then another one of them was sort of a publicity thing, I think. Like a charity case."

"I'm sure it wasn't--" Uraraka says, but Izuku cuts her off with a shake of his head.

"No, I think it was," he says, quietly. "So there was really only one option, you know?"

"You could have picked from the general list," Todoroki points out. "Was it a smaller agency?" He looks confused, maybe. It's kind of hard to tell.

"It's not an agency," Izuku says, shaking his head. "Um, it's from Mirko," he murmurs, his face flushing.

"Wait, like the number seven hero Mirko? The Rabbit Hero?" Uraraka asks, her eyes going wide and sparkly. "Oh my gosh, Deku, that's so cool! With how you were talking, I was worried that you'd gotten somewhere really weird!" She laughs, looking over to Todoroki, who nods.

"It's impressive," Todoroki says. "Mirko is known for refusing to work with others. You must have really made an impression." Izuku bites at his lip nervously.

"I hope it was a good one," he mumbles, "It's kind of strange for her to pick me, right? I mean, I'm..." he gestures at himself.

"Wait, are we talking about Midoriya's internship?" Kaminari twists in his chair to look back at them. "Who'd you decide on?"

"Mirko!" Uraraka answers before Izuku can. "Can you believe it?" Kaminari grins his eyes widening.

“Dude, no way! That’s awesome,” he leans forward, elbowing Jirou where she sits in front of him.
“Jirou, did you hear--”

“Yes, I heard,” Jirou says, sighing before turning to look back at Izuku. “Congratulations, Midoriya.” Izuku blinks.

“T-Thank you,” he stutters out, face flushing yet again. He really wishes it wouldn’t do that. Izuku catches something in the corner of his eye, and he looks over to see Kacchan, staring at him. He’s resting his cheek on his palm, his elbow on the desk, and Izuku blink when Kacchan glares at him, his red eyes narrowing slightly before he glances away. Izuku takes a deep breath, the glances back at Uraraka just as she starts talking again.

Chapter End Notes

cw: brief mention of self harm scars

i hope you enjoyed! tysm for all of the support!! i hope nobody is too disappointed with my choice in the internship! more will be explained later ofc, i just didn't want to keep yall on a cliffhanger for the next one or two days hahah

discord: <https://discord.gg/Vqaj62ceCt>

internship, part 1

Chapter Summary

last time: izuku overheard leadfoot and a new villain, manami, talking about potentially working with shigaraki. izuku also tells his friends about his internship placement and his hero name

Chapter Notes

HI GUYS im in the dorm as we speak... sorry this is so late in the day, but im honestly just happy to finish it at all!! i am so so excited for this arc aaaaaa i love mirko and i love this bit in canon so :3c

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Izuku steps into the gym, nervously checking his phone for the hundredth time to make sure that he has the right time and place. It's windy and warm, and Izuku had made sure to get all of his assignments out of the way yesterday so that he could be here without worrying about getting his homework done in time. Toogata had texted him all of the details the day they met, telling Izuku to wear his sports uniform or workout gear and to bring plenty of water. He'd said that All Might would be in his skeletal form most if not all of the time, and when Izuku glances around the gym, it's easy to spot All Might and Toogata standing next to each other, chatting about something.

"H-Hi," Izuku says, giving them an awkward wave. Toogata perks up, turning to look at him just as All Might raises his head and gives Izuku a gentle smile.

"Hi, Midoriya!" Toogata calls, returning his wave. "I'm glad you could make it! I watched your footage from the sports festival, and oh boy am I excited to spar with you." He walks over to meet Izuku as he approaches. He's dressed in his sports uniform, like Izuku, but it's a little embarrassing how much *bigger* Toogata is than him. Izuku can see muscle rippling under the tight fabric of the uniform top, and Toogata is easily half a foot taller than him, if not more.

"I-I saw your competition, t-too," Izuku squeaks, trying to reign in his stutter and failing horribly. "You did a-amazingly!" Toogata grins even wider, waving a hand like he's dismissing the compliment.

"Thank you, but it's not as impressive as what you managed as a first year. I can certainly see why All Might is so interested in you!" He looks over his shoulder at All Might, who's just watching them. Izuku smiles awkwardly, and he prays his face just *feels* hot and that it isn't actually going red.

"Yes, well," All Might says, walking over to where Toogata and Izuku are standing. "I thought for today it would be good to have the two of you spar." All Might looks at Toogata as his face lights up, then glances back to Izuku. "I know that you probably get a lot of combat training with Aizawa, young Midoriya, and you clearly have exceptional battle sense, but with Mirio's quirk it will be... different, let's say."

“His new quirk?” Izuku asks. “Or his old one? I watched the tapes a few times, and I really only saw the one that lets him pass through objects. It’s really powerful, but you said that his second quirk was different from his old one, so I didn’t think that the thing where he popped out of the ground could be it,” Izuku pauses, putting a finger to his chin. “Is it something subtle? Maybe regeneration, since he didn’t get hurt at the festival in the first place, so I wouldn’t have--”

“I didn’t have it yet at the festival,” Toogata cuts in with a laugh. “Wow, you’re really smart. No wonder you’re so good at fighting.” Izuku realizes what he’d been doing and stares at the ground, embarrassed.

“S-Sorry,” he stammers. “I know it’s creepy, I just--”

“Don’t apologize!” Toogata says, shaking his head. “It’s not creepy, it’s cool. And my new quirk is super strength, by the way. All Might is training me since it’s a lot like his!” He grins, tipping his head to his mentor.

“Yes, that’s right,” All Might says, coughing into his hand. “Young Mirio has been training with me since his second quirk manifested, but I am unable to spar with him in this form, and my time in my other form is limited,” he explains. “So, if you don’t mind, young Midoriya, today will really be more of a favor to me. I apologize for that.”

Izuku shakes his head, blinking at All Might. “It’s no problem!” He says, smiling slightly. “I-I still need practice, and any kind of training with you is already so amazing.” He glances at Toogata. “And, um, Toogata-senpai is really impressive, too, so learning from him would just be so awesome.” He tries not to end up mumbling or blabbering on, and he thinks it works, because he manages to stop himself before someone else has to say something and stop him.

“Mirio,” Toogata says with a grin. “You can call me Mirio, if you’re okay with that.” Izuku blinks, then nods, smiling.

“Um, you can call me Deku, then!” He says, and Mirio blinks at him.

“Deku?” He twists his mouth to the side, like he’s thinking. “Like, Deku? Isn’t that kind of insulting?” Izuku shakes his head, still smiling.

“It’s my hero name!” He grins, glancing at All Might out of the corner of his eye. “I like it.” Izuku looks back to Mirio, who nods and gives him a thumbs up.

“Well, as long as you like it, that’s what matters,” he says, grinning brightly. “Now, let’s spar!” He steps back, into a fighting stance, and Izuku does the same, a smile tugging at his lips.

--

It’s a sunny day when they finally go to their internships. Izuku is nervous, even with all of the excitement and bubbling happiness from his friends, even with the way Uraraka and Tsuyu keep insisting that it’ll go great. Izuku is clutching his costume case in his arms, fidgeting nervously in his uniform. It’s starting to get a little too warm for the blazers, but Izuku isn’t about to take his off, not when he’s wearing a short sleeved shirt underneath.

“Alright, everyone has their costumes?” Aizawa looks over them, all in various states of anxiety and excitement. “Be sure to mind your manners,” he says, his gaze seeming to linger on Kacchan where he stands off to the side.

“Sure thing!” Ashido shouts, grinning, and Aizawa sighs.

“Please address your internship mentors as sir or ma’am,” he reminds her, and she rolls her eyes, still grinning.

“Yes sir,” she says, giggling. Aizawa looks over them one final time.

“Remember that you all have my number in case something happens. Listen to your mentors, and don’t do anything stupid.” He seems to look at Izuku extra long on that one, which Izuku thinks is fair, all things considered. “Alright. You can go,” he says, waving them off. Around Izuku, his friends start to move, opening maps and looking at train schedules. Izuku sighs, turning to Uraraka and Iida where they’re standing beside him. Iida is already turned, though starting to walk away.

“Iida?” Izuku calls, and his friend turns back to look at him, his expression that same solemn one that he’s had too often lately. Iida’s still been eating lunch with them, still been talking and doing his duties as class president, but... he’s been quieter. More withdrawn. Less enthusiastic. It hurts Izuku’s heart. He meets Iida’s eyes.

“If you need someone to talk to,” he says, giving Iida a small smile. “You can always talk to us.” Uraraka nods beside him. “We’re friends, after all.” Iida looks at him, his gaze cool. A small smile quirks up at the edge of his lips.

“Sure,” he says, barely more than a whisper, and he turns, walking away. Izuku watches his back, wondering if he’d really say something, if he needed to.

“Deku,” Uraraka says, and Izuku turns back to look at her. “Which station are you going to?” She still looks worried, but Izuku doesn’t press it. He is, too, so it’d be hypocritical to try and reassure her.

“Ah, I’m meeting her in Tokyo,” Izuku says, reaching into his pocket to pull out a map Mirko had sent him in the mail. “She doesn’t have an agency, so she just wants to meet me at these coordinates,” he says, pointing to the spot on the map and showing Uraraka. “I looked it up, and I’m pretty sure it’s a park.”

Uraraka nods, giving him a small smile. “We’re taking different trains, then,” she says, looking sad. “Ugh, is it weird that I’m nervous?” She fidgets with the handle to her costume case. “I mean, what if we don’t get along?”

Izuku gives her a smile. “I’m sure you will!” He says. “You’re easy to get along with. Gunhead would have to be worse than Kacchan to not like you.” She giggles a little at that.

“Right,” she says, then nudges him in the side with an elbow. “You’ll text me and tell me how it goes?”

He nods. “I will! You have to text me, too,” he replies, and they both smile. He hesitates for a moment, then leans forward and hugs her with one arm, the other still holding his costume suitcase. She returns the hug easily, her body warm against his.

“Be safe, okay Deku?” She whispers in his ear, and he pulls back, smiling.

“You too, Uravity,” he says, and her grin gets even wider at her hero name. She turns, waving at him as she walks towards his station. Izuku takes a deep breath, then starts toward his own.

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When Izuku steps out from the train station and into the bright sunlight, it’s only been about an hour and a half. The ride itself passed too quickly, and Izuku isn’t sure he’s really ready to face

Mirko. His chest feels like it's pressurized, like everything is wound up and ready to spring. He's not entirely sure what's making him feel this way, if it's the fact that he's quirkless and he's meeting with the number seven hero or if it's the fact that said hero never works with others, always refusing to except when absolutely necessary. It's a reputation that he's all too aware of, and in the back of his mind, there's still the idea that maybe, maybe this is all a cruel joke.

It's a nice day, objectively, but as Izuku walks along the sidewalk, as the sun shines onto the concrete where shadows of the many people walking don't block it, he can feel his heart climbing up into his throat. It's both excitement and anxiety all in one, he thinks, but it's hard for him to process how he's feeling when his head keeps going slightly fuzzy, like he's zoning out in class except he's walking to what is quite possibly the most important thing he's done yet for his career.

He keeps trying to make himself focus fully, to bring himself to the present, but it doesn't work. He tries to listen to the bustle of the city around him, tries to bring his mind around to the colors of the city, grey and silver and neon against the blue sky, tries to feel the way his feet are hitting the concrete and the way his clothes shift as he moves, but it isn't enough. Izuku reaches his free hand up and grips his arm, where there are fresh cuts under the sleeve, hidden there from last night. He grips his arm tight, digging his fingers in, and the burst of sharp, clean pain is what lets him finally, finally focus, finally feel present again. Izuku takes a deep breath and gives himself a shake, still walking. *I can do this. I've died before and been fine, I can handle talking to a pro.*

Izuku checks his map just as he sees what looks like a small park, a patch of green within the city. It's past cherry blossom season, but Izuku recognizes cherry trees lining the edge of the park, thick and green with foliage. The grass here is well-kept, a bright green carpet that's perfectly trimmed. Izuku can see footpaths that lead into the park, towards a colorful playground up ahead. It smells greener as he steps onto the gravel pathway, glancing around.

For all that the park is lovely, he doesn't see Mirko or anyone resembling her. He's seen pictures and videos of the number seven hero before, of course, and he knows to expect a short, white haired woman with dark skin and rabbit ears. What he actually sees is a woman with her two children, all three of them with dark, short hair and fair skin. If he squints, he thinks he might see some people up ahead, in the playground, but they're clearly children and not adults. Izuku is confused for a moment--is he in the right place?--but then something occurs to him.

Izuku steps along the path, looking around carefully and listening the best he can. It's worlds away from what he does on patrol, what with the bright sunlight and the sounds of daytime, of people just beyond the cherry trees, of birds twittering in the trees and children laughing and playing, but the concept is the same. Izuku listens, and he looks. He searches for something out of place, something that tips off his instincts, and he finds it when he glances at a particularly tall cherry tree and thinks he sees something white hidden among its dark foliage. He lets a small smile climb up his lips as he approaches the tree.

"H-Hello, Mirko," he says as he tips his head back to see the Rabbit Hero sitting on a large branch of the tree, her legs dangling down and her face painted with a devious grin. "I'm Izuku Midoriya, from U.A."

"I know who you are, kid," she says, hopping down from the tree and landing neatly on the ground in front of him. She's shorter than him, surprisingly, but her ears poke up above both of their heads. Izuku still feels intimidated by her, though, and it isn't helping that she's grinning at him like she's a predator and he's prey.

"R-Right," he says, swallowing. She tips her head slightly, her eyes narrowing.

"Chase me," she says, amusement in her voice, and that's all the warning that Izuku gets before

she's running off to the side, taking a long leap that launches her easily into the next tree, where she glances back with a grin. Izuku blinks, then tears after her, keeping his grip on his costume case as he does.

The wind whips past his face as he follows Mirko. She jumps from that first tree directly onto the fire escape of the building next to her, gripping easily onto the black painted metal and scrambling up to the roof. Izuku grins when he sees it, because it's so similar to what he does often as Ace. It's easy enough to run up to the fire escape and copy her moves, shimmying up onto the roof in a few seconds. When he gets up there, Mirko is waiting, hands on her hips and one eyebrow raised.

"I'm surprised you've made it this far," she says, smirking. "Tired yet?"

Izuku shakes his head and holds up the costume case, grinning. "I haven't even needed both hands," he says, and she cackles at him, tipping her head back to the sky and laughing.

"Alright, then," she laughs. "Come and get me!" She turns and jumps from the roof, leaping onto the next one over easily, covering over three times the distance Izuku had ever been able to jump. He grins and starts to run forward, giving himself a running start before he jumps, right at the edge. He can clearly see Mirko watching him, waiting to see if he makes it, but it's not any longer than some of the jumps he regularly makes as Ace. He lands on the ground and rolls neatly over his shoulder before coming to his feet, costume case still in hand. Mirko nods approvingly, then jumps, sliding down the side of the building to land on the ground.

There's no fire escape on this building, so it's a little more difficult than his usual, but Izuku doesn't waste time, turning his stomach to face the roof and lying down. He scoots his legs over the edge until he can bend at the waist, his feet catching on the top edge of a window below. He grips the top of the roof and lowers himself down to the windowsill for that same window, then repeats the motion as he grabs the top of that window and moves his feet to the top of the next. It's a bit harder with his uniform on and his left hand occupied with his costume, but he manages to get himself low enough to jump neatly from the last window onto the ground. Mirko's waiting for him, but the second his feet touch the ground, she's running away along the edge of the alley.

"You're fast!" she shouts back at him, laughing as he runs after her. "But I'm not even using my quirk," she says, a teasing tone to her voice. Izuku grins wildly back at her, his hair whipping around his face as he runs, the wind brushing against his skin.

"Why not?" he asks, barely out of breath. She laughs again, bending her legs at the knees and jumping off the ground in an easy motion, twisting through the air at more than twice her previous speed.

"You're gonna regret saying that!" She calls back to him, quickly disappearing among the buildings. The message is clear to Izuku; Mirko wants him to find her. It's a challenge, one that he gets as Ace but only rarely. Izuku knows what to do as he weaves between the people, chirping out breathless apologies as he pushes people aside.

He runs through the streets, the bright sun that had seemed so distant earlier warming his skin under his blazer and bringing a few beads of sweat to the surface of his skin. He can't see Mirko, but it doesn't matter--the sound of her jumps may be quiet, but it's distinct from the normal sounds of the city. Izuku is well aware that he's only able to hear it because she's allowing him to, but it's okay with him, because he tracks the sound as she weaves a loose circle around a block of office buildings. He thinks he can guess where she's going next, and he has an idea as he hops up onto a fire escape, quickly running up the stairs until he's up high enough to jump to the roof on the building next door.

Izuku hits his knee against the concrete of the roof briefly, but he ignores the pain and jumps to his feet, running to the edge of the roof and jumping neatly onto the next one. This roof is tiled with a little garden on top, so he feels kind of bad, like he's trespassing, but he's only on it for a few moments, anyway. He actually catches a glimpse of Mirko's ears, just for a couple of seconds, but it's enough to confirm that he's going the right way as he jumps to the next building, the impact stinging his feet. The next part of his plan is a little risky but, well, Izuku's jumped off of enough roofs that he's practically an expert at this point, right?

Izuku skitters to the edge, looking over it for a fire escape, but there isn't one. What there is, however, is a streetlight right beside the building, maybe four feet away and a foot shorter than the roof itself. Izuku grins, launching himself from the roof without thinking, wrapping his arms around the street lamp and sliding down it like it's a fire pole. It's not quite as easy as he'd thought it would be, and the impact of slamming into it will definitely leave bruises along his sternum and ribs, but he slides to the ground and steps away from the pole just in time to see Mirko turn the corner.

"Hey!" He shouts, breathless and grinning. Mirko slows to a stop on the small side street they're both standing on, her grin growing wide and her eyebrows raising.

"I like you, you little brat," she says, hopping forward to put an arm around his shoulders, yanking him close and digging her knuckles into his skull. Izuku winces as she noogies him, not sure if it would be rude to push her away.

"Did I pass your test?" he asks as she releases him, because it's pretty clear that's what it was. Mirko shrugs, putting her hands on her hips.

"You did better than most pros would, so you tell me," she says, then sticks out her right hand. "I'm Rumi Usagiyama, but you can call me Rumi or Mirko. It's nice to meet ya, kid."

Izuku blinks, and he's sure there are stars in his eyes when he takes her hand and shakes it. "I-I'm Izuku Midoriya, but you knew that! Y-You can call me Deku, it's, um, my hero name!" he chirps, feeling embarrassed that he's getting starstruck *now* of all times, after he'd finished chasing her around the city and climbing onto roofs after her like a maniac.

"Cool name, Deku," she says, winking at him. "Let's go back to my place for now." She turns, starting to walk away. "It's not far from here," she calls back at him. "I wanna see what your costume is like, and I'm also kinda hungry." Izuku blinks, then follows after her. She's walking fairly quickly, but it's nothing compared to the chase they just went on, and Izuku easily catches up, walking just one pace behind her so it doesn't seem like he's trying to get in front. Mirko doesn't seem to notice either way, barely glancing over at him as she starts talking again.

"I don't really like, *do*, interns or sidekicks, so this was kind of a stretch for me," she says, hands gesturing in the air as she talks. "But I saw you going absolutely fuckin' feral on the other kids at the sports festival and kicking their asses while they relied on their flashy quirks 'n stuff, so I thought, hey, maybe it's time for me to try something new, yeah?" She glances over at him, a sly grin on her face. "Plus, if you're quirkless, nobody can try and charge your skinny ass with illegal quirk usage, meaning I can take you out on patrol and shit. I'm not gonna babysit you; you're gonna be working like crazy this week, just sayin'." She looks like she's trying to make him nervous, but Izuku can't help the way his heart jumps in excitement at the idea of patrolling with a real hero.

"R-Really?" He asks, gaping. "You think I'm that impressive? Are you really going to take me on patrol? I would really like that, I've never gotten to do anything like that with a real hero, and you're on the top ten and *everything* and I can't believe you noticed me, not when you don't even

want an agency since you prefer to work alone and you said in an interview one time that it was a sign of weakness and--” Mirko cuts him off, laughing.

“Wow, you’ve got a set of lungs on you, dontcha?” She grins at him as she turns down a small street, one with lots of nicer apartment buildings along it. “And yeah, I think it’s a sign of weakness if you have to rely on other heroes to do your own job, but it’s different when it’s a kid. I’m supposed to be teachin’ you, that’s kinda the point, right?” She claps a hand on his back, startling him into stumbling slightly, and she laughs at that, too.

“Jumpy, huh?” She looks at him out of the corner of her eyes, her face somehow slightly softer. “We’re here, by the way,” she says, pointing at an apartment building. Izuku glances up at it, blinking. It’s not the nicest one on the block by any stretch of the imagination, but there are balconies on each floor, with sliding glass doors, and it really doesn’t surprise Izuku when Mirko just jumps straight onto the third floor balcony, waving at him.

“C’mon!” She says, taking a key out of her pocket and unlocking a latch that Izuku can’t see at his angle. Izuku glances around the front of the building as she slides the door open, and he sees a good spot to climb along the corner of the building, where there are decorative bricks set in a way that they make little ledges every so often. He starts climbing, the brick digging into his bare hand. It’s hard to climb this way with one hand still on his costume case, but after a short distance, he sees Mirko’s hand reach down from the balcony. Izuku blinks, then hands her the case, which she takes and sets down on the balcony.

“Thanks,” he says up to her and she shrugs, flipping her long hair over her shoulder.

“Not a problem,” she says back at him just as he reaches her balcony, carefully sliding his feet from the corner to the outside of the balcony’s fence, climbing over it to solid ground. She turns, seemingly satisfied that he’d made it up okay, walking through the open door to her apartment. Izuku picks up his costume case before heading in after her.

It’s dark inside, and Izuku doesn’t know what he expected, but it wasn’t this. The apartment is nice, sure, but it’s mostly unfurnished, with a huge white couch in the center of the room but no coffee table. There’s a TV hung on the wall in front of the couch, and Izuku can see a messy kitchen in the back next to a hallway. It’s clearly lived in, though, with shoes in a row along the side of the balcony door and a large blanket heaped on the floor in front of the couch. There’s a stack of paperwork in one corner, along with a plastic cup filled with pens and pencils and a clipboard with too many papers shoved in it. Izuku feels kind of bad for it.

Mirko walks over to the actual front door of the apartment and flips on the lights, which only makes it more clear just how messy the apartment is. Izuku is pretty sure he can see dust on the stovetop, which... He’s not sure to feel about that.

“You... you live here?” He asks, uncertainly. Mirko looks over to him, a confused expression on her face before she narrows her eyes slightly.

“Yeah? Something wrong with it?” She challenges, folding her arms over her chest. Izuku swallows, then glances around again.

“N-No, it’s just not what I expected, I guess,” he answers. Mirko shrugs, walking back over to the balcony door and taking her shoes off. Izuku quickly does the same, sliding his red sneakers off and placing them along the wall with Mirko’s many different shoes. It looks like under the costume boots, her feet are actually normal, if a bit large, which surprises him. He’d expected them to be paws, or something like that.

“I don’t have a lot of time to clean or decorate,” Mirko says, and Izuku glances up to see her with a strange expression. “Not that it matters that much, really. But yeah, this is my home, not my agency, so don’t go spilling the location to the forums,” she says, grinning at him again. He shakes his head quickly.

“I-I wouldn’t!” he replies quickly, and she nods

“I figured, you don’t seem that dumb,” she says, then gestures to the costume case. “Here, let me show you the bathroom so you can change. I wanna see what the support department cooked up for you.” She turns, walking to the hallway Izuku’d spotted earlier. She stops at the second door on the right, turning the handle and flicking on the lights before stepping aside so Izuku can walk into the small space.

It’s just an ordinary bathroom, clean enough that Izuku suspects there’s another one that Mirko actually uses. He pulls the door shut behind him, hesitating a moment before locking it, just in case. He can’t hear if Mirko’s outside the door still, and he doesn’t think she’d open it on him, but it’s better safe than sorry.

He changes quickly into the costume, not really surprised to see that the support department has taken it upon themselves to make changes. The pants and the fitted long sleeved shirt are pretty much the same, keeping the essence of the costume his mom made for him, but he’s happy to see that they’re included thick, heavy arm guards like he requested, ones that he could easily block a knife strike with. There’s also an upgraded utility belt, this one complete with two matching knives, long and thin and wicked sharp when he slides one out of its sheath. The metal is shiny and polished, and he can see his own wide grin reflected in its surface.

He only notices the matching sheathes hidden in the arm guards when he puts them on and flexes his wrists. There’s a small handle poking out, only when he bends his wrist just so, and he blinks, tugging at it. The small knife that comes out has a blade only about as long as the palm of his hand, but he’s happy to see it. He slides it back into place, then checks and finds a matching one hidden in the other arm guard.

The only other major additions are the faceguard, the grey metal piece that rests neatly on his collarbone and protects his neck, and an oddly shaped ceramic and silicone object in a clear case. It looks almost like... teeth. There’s a note accompanying it, and Izuku reads it with furrowed brows.

We noticed you like to bite! We thought you might do a little more damage with this--if it doesn’t fit right, just let us know. - Support Department

Izuku grins, taking the piece out of its case and examining it. It looks like it’s supposed to fit over his top teeth, and he looks in the mirror so that he doesn’t put it on wrong as he slides it on. He can hardly feel it once it’s in place, but when he draws his tongue over the bottom edge of his teeth he very nearly slices his tongue open. He looks in the mirror and can just barely see an edge of sharp, glittering silver at the bottom of the frontmost six top teeth. He grins, and it’s almost invisible. *The support department is full of geniuses*, he thinks, examining himself in the mirror. The gloves and the arm guards and black and green respectively, matching well with his green and black theme, and the weapons aren’t so visible that they might intimidate civilians. *It’s perfect.*

He neatly folds his uniform, even though it’s filthy at this point, and gathers it and the now empty costume case before unlocking the bathroom door and opening it. Mirko isn’t in the hallway, but when Izuku steps forward, peeking into the living room, he can see her leaning against the back of the couch, clearly waiting for him.

“Nice!” She comments, nodding approvingly as he walks into the living room. “I see they finally

decided to arm you,” she says, circling him slowly and looking over the costume.

“There are hidden knives, too,” he says excitedly, flicking a wrist and tugging out the small knife there. The movement is easy, even without having practiced, and Mirko grins wide.

“Hell yeah! I like to see that,” she says, and Izuku smiles at her.

“My teeth, too,” he says, reaching up and popping the mouthpiece out so she can see. “It’s like a blade on the edge,” he explains, holding it so the metal hidden in the mouth piece catches the light.

“Oh, so you *do* plan on making biting part of your permanent brand?” Mirko asks, raising an eyebrow at him, face full of amusement. “Good, because I’m pretty sure all of social media has already decided it’s your thing.” Izuku flushes red at that, glancing off to the side.

“I-I’m on social media?” He asks, not really wanting to know. “I don’t really keep up with it, I’m more of a fan forum kind of person...”

“Oh, yeah kid, you’re pretty popular already!” Mirko barks out a laugh. “I think people like watching you fight dirty. It’s got a nice edge to it, y’know?” Izuku nods, even though he isn’t sure he really knows. Mirko tips her head at him slightly.

“You hungry?” she asks, pulling out her phone. “I think I’m gonna order pizza, and then we can patrol or something after we eat.”

“Pizza?” Izuku echoes, blinking. He’d thought that a pro would eat healthier, like something high protein or with a lot of vegetables, but he supposes he hadn’t expected a pro to live in a messy apartment in Tokyo, either. It’s strange, seeing that for all of Mirko’s fame and power, she’s still a twenty-something year-old. Izuku wonders if he’ll be like that when he’s a pro, or if he’ll be more... polished. He’s actually not sure which he’d prefer--he’d always just imagined himself as a hero, not any further detail.

“Hey kid, you’re mumbling,” Mirko says, and Izuku glances back up, flushing red as she laughs. “Do you like pepperoni?”

“Y-Yes!” He says, nodding quickie. Mirko taps out something on her phone, walking around to sit on the couch, plopping down onto it.

“It’s ordered!” She says, then pats the seat next to her. “Sit down. I’m gonna put your sports festival fights on TV and we’re gonna go over what you did right and what you did wrong.” She’s got a predatory grin on her face, and Izuku has a feeling he’s in for a long night as he swallows and moves to sit down next to her.

Chapter End Notes

cw: none i think? brief self harm mentions

i hope you enjoyed!!! sorry if my characterization of mirko is off, she doesn't appear very much in canon and i haven't read vigilantes so i don't have much to work with ;-; but i hope you enjoyed either way!!

thank you as always for the support and love! ik im behind on answering comments,

but i promise ill get to them!

discord: <https://discord.gg/Vqaj62ceCt>

internship, part 2

Chapter Summary

last time: izuku met up with mirko and chased her around the city a bit, then got pizza with her. something's a little off with iida, though.

Chapter Notes

HHHHH sorry that this is a little bit shorter than usual, the next scene is gonna be LONG so i wanted to save it for next chap :3c i hope u enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Izuku only feels a little bit bad when he sneaks out the second he's home after patrolling with Mirko. It's far past his usual time, but Izuku is too amped up to do anything other than put on his Ace costume and sneak out the window. His mom had been asleep when he'd gotten home, anyway, so it's not like she'll notice if he left again. It's nice and semi-warm out, even though it's around two in the morning, so when he runs along the familiar streets-- *his* streets--it warms the chill that had set into his bones on the heavily air conditioned train home.

It's quiet, as usual, but Izuku has a feeling, just a hint in the back of his head that something might be happening tonight. It's a sensation he gets occasionally, and after doing reading about it online, he's pretty sure everyone who does hero or vigilante work starts to feel it eventually. Sometimes, it's nothing; he'll go out on a hunch and just find the usual, no difference. But a couple of times, he's followed his instinct and something *had* been wrong, like last time when there'd been a bad car accident and Izuku had helped the pros on the scene get the civilians out, or a month ago when it'd been a teenage girl being drugged and taken from the party she was at. Izuku doesn't think it's a power, not like a quirk or anything, but it's something he doesn't want to ignore.

It's humid, too, he notices as he turns down the alleyway he always does, glancing at the potted plant he's used to seeing there. The flowers that had been buds last time are blooming, finally, little bright clusters of yellow and gold and orange in the dark. Izuku smiles under his mask as he continues on.

The patrol with Mirko had been surprisingly similar to his own, just... louder. Tokyo is more active than Musutafu, especially in the part of Tokyo that Mirko had taken him through, and she didn't move nearly as silently as he tried to, shouting to people who were making trouble and laughing the whole way. It was a strange mix of underground movements, quiet leaps and silent climbing, and the loud flashy style he expects of daytime heroes. Izuku likes it, even though he's not sure he can incorporate that much noise into his own style without getting himself killed. He's pretty sure that her quirk gives her enhanced endurance on top of the super strength and improved senses, judging by some of the tapes he's seen where she gets badly injured and barely flinches. He kind of wants to get to that point, eventually. *It's not like I can die*, he notes as he climbs a fire escape up onto a familiar rooftop, *so pain itself is just... vestigial. I don't need it.*

When he gets to the top of the roof, it's the exact moment a cool, clear breeze brushes over the building, and Izuku breathes into it, slow and content. It's only a second, a heartbeat of quiet and calm, but it's nice. Izuku thinks it's only because of that moment that he even notices what he sees next.

In an old abandoned bar just to the left of this building, the direction Izuku doesn't normally patrol, Izuku sees just the faintest flicker of light behind the boards over the windows. It's just a tiny hint, just a little burst of something warm and yellow, like an incandescent light bulb, but it's enough to make him pause, glancing to the building with narrowed eyes. Izuku is watching the building, looking it over when it happens, and that's the only reason why he sees it at all when a side door, opening into the tiny, dark alley beside the building, cracks open, light spilling out. Izuku sees a familiar dark figure with metal rabbit ears and a matching mask step into the building, the door shutting just as quickly as it had opened. Izuku feels his heartbeat stutter in his chest because *I would have missed that, if I'd looked away for even a second, noticed the light a moment too late.*

Izuku creeps back to the side of his building, climbing down the fire escape carefully. He supposes he doesn't need to be *too* stealthy, because there's no way he won't be resetting after this, but he still wants to be able to hear whatever is going on inside the building without being caught, so he moves like a shadow along the sides of the nearby buildings until he's nestled under one of the boarded up windows, presses against the side of the building so the angle would hide him even if someone pried off the boards and looked out the dusty glass. It's quiet, but he can hear voices from inside, murmurs of conversation. Some of them are familiar, too familiar, and it makes Izuku's breath catch in his throat, somewhere between his collarbone and jaw.

"Leadfoot," Shigaraki's raspy voice drawls, low and muffled by the wall between him and Izuku. "Nice of you to finally show up."

"I'm on time," Leadfoot answers, sounding unimpressed. "Forgive me for not reading your mind and knowing you and him would both be ready... what, an hour early? It's rude to start negotiations before every party is present." Izuku hears a laugh from inside.

"Not if it's intentional," Shigaraki answers.

"You missed most of this *child's* insanity," an unfamiliar voice, low and cracked, speaks up.

"Hmm," Leadfoot hums. "Stain, I suppose." Izuku freezes when he hears that name, and it all clicks. *This is that meeting she and Manami were talking about.* He feels both lucky and terrified, to be able to listen in on this.

"Yes," Stain growls. "And you're Leadfoot of that Gekkeiju group. I'll have you know from the beginning I have little interest in making your little *family* money." Izuku blinks. *Family? Gekkeiju?* He realizes, abruptly, just how little he really knows about this group.

"I don't particularly care about money myself," Leadfoot says, and Izuku thinks he can *hear* her rolling her eyes. "But I'm assuming you know that already, or you wouldn't be speaking with me at all, would you?"

"Correct," Stain hisses. Izuku hears shuffling from within the room, then a startled noise.

"Get off me!" That's Shigaraki, he thinks.

"You're bleeding," Leadfoot says, then laughs. "Aww, did you two have to beat each other up to come to an agreement? Maybe it's a good thing you started early."

“Like you’d have been able to hurt me,” Shigaraki snaps back, and Leadfoot laughs again.

“I got a power up from a friend,” she says, amusement in her voice. “So I think it would have been easy enough, actually.”

“Whatever,” Shiragaki says, and there’s more rustling from within the room. “I hate working with you and your band of fucking creeps,” he mutters.

“You’re one to talk,” Leadfoot replies, then sighs. “Tell me what you’ve agreed on, since you decided to leave me out. I’ll decide if Gekkeiju still has anything to give you.”

“Like we’re not the ones doing *you* a fucking favor,” Shigaraki rasps. “The hero killer is gonna help us with a couple little *pests* we have, and in return, we’ll lend some Noumus to him and make a big mess in Hosu City, like he wants.” Shigaraki laughs, low and painful sounding. Izuku shivers.

“Those are children,” Leadfoot deadpans. “U.A. students, aren’t they?” Izuku feels his blood run cold as Shigaraki hums, his voice rough and dry.

“You’re the one with the reputation for killing witnesses, Leadfoot.” Shigaraki says, voice petulant. “Don’t tell me you’ve got a soft spot for brats?”

“I just thought you’d be able to kill them without help, since they’re actual, literal children,” Leadfoot says, sounding bored. “Especially considering how you keep telling us you’ll take down All Might, who’s objectively stronger than a gang of teenagers.”

“Are you fucking done yet?” Shigaraki hisses. “Will you give us your support or not, bitch?”

“Don’t get snarky with me, Shigaraki,” Leadfoot says. “I’ll send another one of the lieutenants to help you and Stain at Hosu tomorrow, but don’t expect her to be as easy to deal with as I am.” Izuku swallows, his throat thick and difficult to breath through all of a sudden. *Iida is in Hosu*, he remembers. *Iida is in Hosu, and they’re targeting UA students.*

“Oh, great,” Shigaraki drawls. “Kurogiri, I don’t want to have to put up with another one of these fucking maniacs.”

“You’ll manage, Shigaraki,” Kurogiri replies. Izuku hadn’t even realized he was there, but it makes sense, considering.

“Why can’t you come yourself, Leadfoot?” Stain asks. Izuku wonders the same thing.

“I could, but you don’t want me to,” she replies. “My associate’s quirk is far better suited to this mission, and she’s been dying to finally make her ‘debut,’ so it’s only natural.” She chuckles, low and dark. “Plus, you and her will get along, Stain. She’s a fan.”

“Oh?” Stain asks. “Who is she?”

“She’s going by Fangirl,” Leadfoot replies. “And she’s got the same view as you, regarding heroes. I wouldn’t let her near Shigaraki, though.” Leadfoot laughs, like Izuku’s never heard before, a dark, sarcastic laugh. “You two would kill each other and the entire city in moments.”

“Is she your fucking pet or something?” Shigaraki asks, sounding annoyed. “Are you her *handler*?”

“Is Kurogiri yours?” Leadfoot fires back. “And no. We’re of equal rank, but if anything, she’s more powerful than me. The only reason I’m here instead of her is that she’s got more important

things to deal with right now.”

“More important than this?” Kurogiri asks, voice quiet.

“More important than anything,” Leadfoot confirms, voice serious. “What, did you think the only thing our group does is talk to half baked villain teams and chivalrous murderers?” She sighs, and it’s startling to Izuku because he’d expected a laugh. He wishes he could see their faces. “Does that work for the two of you?”

“Do we get a choice?” Shigaraki replies. “It’s fine, I guess.”

“It’s acceptable,” Stain murmurs. “I want to meet this Fangirl, soon. I hope she lives up to your praise.”

“Was it praise?” Leadfoot asks, her voice sarcastic. “I’ll be going, then. I’ll let the boss know that you two are on board. Oh, and it was nice to see you again, Kurogiri. I like the suit.”

“Thank you,” Kurogiri replies, a note of amusement in his voice. “Yours is quite nice, as well.”

“Can you two fucking stop,” Shigaraki says, not a question. “I don’t care about fucking fashion or whatever. If you’re leaving, leave.”

“One final thing,” Leadfoot says, just as Izuku hears the door to the alleyway open. He stiffens where he’s pressed to the other side of the building.

“What.” Shigaraki’s impatient voice is louder than it was with the door shut.

“You really need to get better security,” Leadfoot replies, stepping out to look at Izuku as he stares back at her with wide eyes. “This bar is nice and all, but it’s not exactly the best base for an up and coming villain band.”

“Whatever,” Shigaraki replies. “I hope I never fucking see your stupid face again.”

“You’ve never seen it in the first place,” Leadfoot replies, shoving the door shut. Izuku hears it rather than sees it shut completely. Leadfoot looks at him through her mask.

“You know I don’t have a choice this time, right?” She asks, voice barely audible. Izuku swallows, his throat clicking softly in the quiet of the street.

“I know,” he replies, barely above a whisper.

“I’ll make it quick,” she promises, raising a hand covered in metal rings. Izuku sees nothing but a flash of violet light and smooth, grey metal before he’s gone.

--

His first thought when he opens his eyes to the street just outside his house, his Ace costume already on and the night turned back to the first few moments after he’d snuck out, is that she’d been right. It was quick, and painless. If she wasn’t a villain and he wasn’t the vigilante she’d just killed, he’d ask her how she did it so he could copy it himself for next time. It’s almost disorienting to die without the usual pain and fear, the feeling of emptiness before he goes. He both misses it and doesn’t.

This time, when he runs, it’s not toward the meeting site or his usual route. It’s towards where sometimes, if he’s lucky, Aizawa will be out as Eraserhead, checking up on the part of the city

close to UA, near the train station and the old bridge where Izuku'd found him before. It's a little out of his way, and it's late enough in the night that Izuku doubts he'll find Aizawa, but this is important. *They're going after Hosu City*, Izuku thinks to himself as he leaps from rooftop to rooftop, stealth abandoned in favor of speed. If he wants to find Aizawa, he'll need to cover as much ground as possible.

Or maybe not, he thinks as he spots a familiar stretch of white cloth looping around a telephone pole as Eraserhead propels himself through the air maybe three or four blocks away. He's far enough away that if it wasn't for the glint of gold or the distinctive shape of his capture weapon, Izuku might have a hard time recognizing him. As it is, Izuku grits his teeth and increases his pace, running to catch up to the man. It's hard enough to catch up to a pro in general, but it's not helped by the fact that Izuku's been running around all day and his muscles are sore and burning under his skin.

"Eraser!" he shouts, praying that Aizawa is close enough to hear. He must be, because he jerks to a stop on the roof he's running across, turning to look in Izuku's direction. Izuku thinks he might see a glint of red for just a moment before Eraserhead seems to recognize him.

"Ace?" He calls back, changing direction and jumping from his roof to the one next to Izuku's building. "What's going on?" Izuku doesn't answer immediately, instead jumping from his roof toward the one Eraserhead is on. The capture weapon shoots out, wrapping around his hips and helping him land neatly on the roof. Izuku doesn't really *need* the help, but he doesn't say as much, instead looking up at his teacher and speaking, breathless from the exertion and the adrenaline.

"Eraserhead, I found Shigaraki and Stain having a meeting," he says, seeing Aizawa's head jerk back in surprise. "They're working with Leadfoot, with, uh, Gekkeiju?" He's still not entirely sure that's the name of the group, but Aizawa doesn't seem surprised to hear it. "They're going to attack Hosu City tomorrow," he breathes out, breath shaky and uneven. "They're targeting UA students."

Eraserhead shakes his head, looking Izuku over. "Haven't I told you a hundred times to stay away from that group?" he asks, grabbing Izuku by the bicep and tugging him closer. "That goes *double* for the League of Villains. You could have *died*."

"I--" Izuku swallows. "I *almost* did," he says, instead of saying that he *actually* did. He can see Aizawa's eyes narrowed behind the slits in his goggles.

"Are you injured?" he asks, like he wasn't just looking Izuku over for injuries. Izuku shakes his head, and Eraserhead releases him with a sigh. "You said tomorrow?"

Izuku nods. "You... you have a student in Hosu City right now, don't you?" He asks, hesitantly. Aizawa stares at him.

"What makes you say that?" Aizawa asks, voice carefully neutral, and Izuku just shrugs, glancing away and biting at his lip under his mask.

"My quirk," he says quietly. "I, um. I don't know details, but--" Eraserhead cuts him off.

"What do you know?" His gaze feels like it's burning into Izuku, even though Aizawa isn't using his quirk. Izuku wonders if he cares this much for Izuku, too, or if it's just for students who behave and don't cause problems, like Iida.

"Tomorrow," Izuku says, voice shaky even though he doesn't think he's scared. "The hero killer, a villain from Gekkeiju named Fangirl, and some Noumus are attacking Hosu City." He shakes his

head. "I don't know anything else. Stain and Shigaraki are targeting UA students, though, I know that much."

Eraserhead sighs, bringing a hand to run through his messy dark hair. "I appreciate the information, but you need to *stop*," he hisses, low and serious. "You're not a hero. You're a civilian and *a child* at that. I don't want your blood on my hands because you tried too hard to get information from these villains. They won't hesitate to kill you, like I've told you at least three times already." It's his teacher voice, Izuku notes.

"I know," Izuku says, quietly. "But it's important that I get this information, or more people than just me will die." Aizawa sucks in a breath.

"Your life is important, too," he says, and Izuku reflexively shakes his head. Aizawa is staring at him, his brows furrowed, and something about the scrutiny makes Izuku's skin crawl.

"It's okay, really," Izuku says, turning to go. "Don't worry about me." A warm hand drops onto his shoulder, and Izuku flinches before he can stop himself. Eraserhead lets go, but Izuku still hears what he says as Izuku runs and jumps to the next roof over.

"Do you *want* to die?" he asks, quietly, and Izuku's sure it's a rhetorical question. He doesn't answer, even if it isn't, but the question sits heavily on his mind as he weaves through the city, the pale light of the sun starting to peek through the horizon to the east.

--

Izuku meets Mirko at her apartment, this time, and he's heavy with exhaustion from being up for the entire night save for two hours of quick sleep he'd managed to squeeze in before he caught his early train ride to Tokyo. He's beginning to wonder if he should have done what Kirishima decided to do and stayed closer to his internship itself, but it's a little later for that now. He at least has the sense to pack something to eat for breakfast, but he fell asleep on the train and didn't get to eat it, so the granola bar is sitting in the backpack he has tossed over his shoulder.

He climbs up to the balcony, mostly because he doesn't actually know how to find her door from inside the building, scaling the brick wall easily now that it's the second time. There's a white curtain over the glass door on the balcony, and he knocks gently against the glass, the cool surface hitting his knuckles. It's only a moment before Izuku can see the curtain being pulled aside, revealing Mirko already in her hero costume. She tugs the door open for him, a grin already on her face.

"Hey, Deku, long time no see!" She steps aside, and Izuku walks into her apartment, sliding his shoes off and setting them next to the door.

"H-Hi, Mirko," he says, giving her a little smile of his own. "What are we doing today?" he asks, stepping into the apartment on socked feet.

"Patrolling again, but daytime version," she says, glancing at him. "How come you're not in your costume already?"

"Oh, we're not supposed to wear them if we're not with our mentors, since we're not actually heroes yet," Izuku explains. "I have it in here though," he says, gesturing to his backpack. Mirko nods.

"Well then, what are you waiting for? Go and change! I'm gonna get another cup of coffee real quick," she turns, walking into the kitchen before Izuku even decides if he needs to respond. He

stands there for a second, then hurries over to her bathroom to change.

He changes quickly, now that he knows what everything is, and when he steps out of the bathroom in his hero costume, Mirko is leaning against the back of the couch, sipping on a steaming mug of black coffee. She grins at him, red eyes reminding Izuku of Kacchan.

“Are you old enough to drink coffee?” She asks, gesturing to where there’s a mug sitting on her counter, steaming gently in the dim light of the apartment. “I kind of forgot that kids aren’t supposed to have caffeine, and I made you a cup.”

“I-I don’t drink it often, but I think I’m old enough,” he answers, surprised that she’d thought of him. “I’ve never had it black, though.”

She snickers around a mouthful of her own coffee. “Try it. I want to see the look on your face.” Izuku isn’t sure that he necessarily wants to if it’s *that* kind of a thing, but he dutifully walks over to the countertop, picking up the mug. It’s a Hawks mug, he notes, staring at the red wings on the front of it.

“Are you a fan?” he asks, tracing the edge of the design. Mirko snorts.

“Nah, me and Hawks are besties,” she answers. “He brought me that after he broke one of my other ones, since he gets his own merch for free. Cheap bastard.” She slurps her coffee, watching Izuku over the rim of her mug. Izuku sniffs his coffee. It smells nice, like chocolate or nuts or something. He takes a sip, and it’s bitter and strong, but not bad. He kind of likes it.

“It’s good,” he says, looking back and Mirko, who nods and smiles.

“I like you even more, now,” she says, giggling. “I think we’re gonna head east a ways today, that way you can--” She’s cut off by her phone ringing, loud and shrill in the apartment. She curses under her breath and pulls it out from her pocket, glancing down at it, then looks up at him.

“I gotta take this, sorry,” she says, then presses a button and holds the phone up to her ear. “Hey, what’s up?”

There’s some talking from the other end, and Mirko frowns, walking past Izuku to set her half-empty mug down on the countertop. Izuku can’t make out what the other person is saying.

“I was just gonna take my internship kid over to Aragawa and show him some stuff,” she says, tapping her fingers on the countertop. “Why?” Izuku can hear part of what they say, this time.

“...Hosu City...tip... just in case.” It’s a male voice speaking, but not one Izuku recognizes.

“Alright,” Mirko says, sounding annoyed. “Who else is coming?” She walks into the kitchen itself, so all Izuku can make out is vague chatter, something that might be a list of names or might just be talking. He can’t tell.

“Yeah, yeah, I’ll give him a call. I dunno if he’s in Tokyo right now, though, so good luck.” She pauses. “Okay. Who’s the source for this, anyway?” The person on the other end of the line replies, but whatever it is makes Mirko frown. “Again? If Eraser doesn’t start sharing who his mystery source is, I’m gonna have to beat it out of him,” she says, and Izuku realizes, abruptly, that *he* is Eraserhead’s mystery source. He’s glad, on some level, that Aizawa isn’t sharing who he’s getting the information from, and he’s also glad that he’s warning other heroes, but some part of Izuku also feels small. He doesn’t know why, but he thinks it might be because he’s not used to this, not used to adults taking things he says *seriously*.

“Hey, change of plans, we’re going to Hosu,” Mirko says, snapping Izuku out of his thoughts. She shoves her phone back in her pocket. “It’s only a ten minute train ride, so it’s not too bad,” she says, picking her cup of coffee back up and chugging it all in a series of quick gulps, tipping her head back as he does. She sets it back down on the counter with a sigh.

“What’s happening in Hosu?” Izuku asks, mostly just to see how much she’ll tell him. He knows perfectly well what’s happening in Hosu, seeing as he’s the reason Mirko knows now.

“There’s supposedly a villain group cooking something up,” Mirko says, walking over to the glass door and sliding her shoes on. “I’m not sure how reliable the info is, but the Hero Commission isn’t taking any chances right now.” She pauses. “One sec, I gotta call Hawks and tell him.” She reaches into her pocket and pulls out her phone, and after a moment of thought, Izuku does the same with his. As Mirko steps onto the balcony to talk to Hawks, Izuku sends a quick text to Iida.

Hey, I’m going to be in Hosu today. How’s your internship going? He doesn’t mention Stain or the villains, simply because he has a feeling that Iida wouldn’t *avoid* Stain, not after what happened with his brother. There’s no reply, though, and Izuku isn’t even sure that Iida’s read it. For all he knows, Iida’s hard at work at his internship right now. There’s not really any reason for Izuku to worry, right? Iida’s probably just trying to focus on his studies. Izuku isn’t worried. He doesn’t need to be, because nothing’s wrong.

At least, that’s what Izuku tells himself when he and Mirko leave for the train. Izuku keeps checking his phone, just in case Iida says something, but it’s radio silence from his friend. Izuku is tempted to text Uraraka and ask her if she’s heard from him, but he doesn’t want to distract her. *She’d been so excited to work with Gunhead*, he reminds himself. *She doesn’t need to have this distracting her*.

It’s a short walk to the train station, made shorter by the fact that Mirko insists they take a route over the tops of buildings to get there. Izuku doesn’t talk much, on the way over, because the conversation he’d overheard the night before is playing in his head, over and over again, and he’s starting to get light headed. He’s not sure if it’s from the lack of food or lack of sleep, but either way his head feels fuzzy and heavy by the time they’re boarding the train that will take them to Hosu City. Izuku sits next to Mirko when they step into the mostly empty compartment, and he doesn’t miss the way she looks over him, frowning.

“Are you... okay?” she asks, voice quiet. “You look fucking exhausted.”

“I’m okay,” Izuku answers, not denying that he’s exhausted. As if punctuating his point, his stomach grumbles at that exact moment, and Izuku cringes and the way Mirko raises an eyebrow at him.

“Did you even eat before you came to my place? And did you *sleep* last night?” She sighs, shaking her head. “Jeez kid, I thought you would have gotten home around midnight.”

Izuku shrugs. “I, um, did some training after I got back?” he says, not looking at Mirko. “And I brought a granola bar, I just forgot to eat it on the way over.” He tugs his backpack into his lap from where he’d set it on the floor, unzipping it and pulling out the granola bar to show her. The package is crinkly in his hands.

“Well, eat it now, doofus,” she says, scowling. “Why’d you train at night? Did I not go hard enough on you yesterday or something? You sure seemed worn out by the end.”

Izuku shakes his head, unwrapping the granola bar with shaking fingers. “I-I just thought I needed it,” he says, unable to tell her what he was *actually* doing. The granola bar smells sweet, like honey

and oats and chocolate. The smell makes his stomach rumble again.

“Well, you don’t need it more than you need sleep, kid.” Mirko sighs. “Look at me for a sec.” Izuku blinks, then complies, meeting her dark red eyes.

“I know I have a reputation for being a badass,” she starts, “but even I sleep. Every hero does. If you don’t, you get sloppy, and people get hurt. Yourself included,” she says, raising her brows pointedly. “Tonight, I want you to promise me you’ll sleep when you get home. If you don’t, I’m gonna kidnap you and make you sleep on my shitty couch,” she says, a slight grin tugging at her lips.

“It’s not shitty,” Izuku says, taking a bite of his granola bar. “And I’ll try to sleep tonight.”

“Not try,” Mirko says, rolling her eyes at him. “You *will* .” Izuku swallows his bite of food.

“Okay,” he says, because the exhaustion he’s feeling is really, honestly not pleasant. “I’ll get some rest tonight.” *I’ll need it, after Stain and Shigaraki attack Hosu.*

“Good,” Mirko says, seemingly satisfied. Izuku lets out a soft breath of relief and takes another bite of his granola bar, glancing back down at his phone as he does. There’s still no reply from Iida.

Chapter End Notes

cw: none i think

discord: <https://discord.gg/Vqaj62ceCt>

thank you as always for reading and for supporting me!!! it means SO MUCH you have no idea.

also if you saw me leaving the outline in last time.... no u didn't

internship, part 3

Chapter Summary

last time: izuku got some juicy juicy intel on gekkeiju, aka that group leadfoot is in, and he let aizawa know! now him and mirko are headed to hosu city.

Chapter Notes

hi guys!!! class starts tomorrow omg im nervous. hopefully i can still update daily!!!! sorry if this isn't as good as usual i didn't sleep well last night ugh

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Izuku isn't surprised, exactly, when the side of the train explodes inward, the metal just twenty feet away from him curling in and snapping, breaking with a horrible sound like a screech of a dying animal, but he still startles, because *isn't it a bit soon?* Some part of him had thought that, at least, the attack would wait until they'd gotten off the train, waited until they'd had a chance to meet up with the other heroes that were coming to the area. Izuku supposes it's not allowed to be that easy, not with him. He still wishes it could be for once when he looks over to the gaping hole in the side of the train and sees a Noumu, skin a pale sickly grey, climb through into the train.

He's on his feet in a heartbeat, the empty granola bar wrapper dropping to the ground as Mirko stands beside him, already running at the Noumu, leg extending into a strong kick that sends the thing flying back out of the train. She whips her head back to look at him, red eyes wide and white hair rippling in the wind.

"Stay here, kid!" She shouts back at him, but Izuku is already running toward the gap.

"No way!" he replies, following her as she jumps from the train onto a building below, a drop that stings the bottom of his feet even through his shoes but doesn't cause any real damage. Mirko glares at him, but keeps moving, dashing after the Noumu.

"Yeah, I appreciate the thought, but stop!" she shouts. "You're still a civilian, brat." It takes all of Izuku's skills to keep up with her, stopping about ten feet behind her on a roof as she kicks down onto the Noumu's skull, sending its head slamming into the concrete.

"It's not like I can get charged with illegal quirk usage," he points out, unsheathing a knife from his belt and jumping forward at the Noumu where Mirko's foot has it pinned to the roof. He draws the knife down along its muscular neck, wincing away as blood sprays out at him, too dark to be that of a human.

"Yeah, but you can fucking *die* ," Mirko points out, leaning down to grab the bleeding, pinned Noumu and twist its head at the neck. Izuku grits his teeth at the sickening crunch it makes, but more than that, the way the Noumu doesn't stop struggling, even as its neck is broken.

"So can the civilians of Hosu," Izuku points out, watching as Mirko stomps down on the Noumu's

head again. It doesn't get up or move at all, this time, not as its head cracks open like an egg smashed on the side of a mixing bowl. "And they don't have weapons or training to help themselves."

Mirko huffs out a long breath of air, glancing to the north with her ears twitching. "Fine," she growls. "But I don't fucking like it. Don't get your skinny ass killed, you got that?"

"I'll try," Izuku mutters, turning and running to where he can see a fight breaking out from his vantage point on the roof. There's fire and there's blood, but what really stands out are the Noumu, *multiple* Noumu, each a slightly different shape or size. Izuku bites his lip as he jumps to the next roof, rolling through the impact and hopping back to his feet just in time to stop at the edge, glancing down to see a fire escape. He doesn't hesitate to drop himself down onto it, running down the stairs and onto the ground below, the sounds of fighting louder, down here.

Izuku runs, his new costume boots broken in already from the patrol yesterday as they pound against the concrete, taking him closer to the sounds of conflict, to the crackle of fire and the screams of pain. Izuku knows to expect something awful, knows to expect something bloody, but he's not prepared to turn around a corner and see *this* to see Noumus that tower over the people on the ground, dust and smoke mingling in a thick cloud that rises. There's a hero on the ground, curling on her side and not moving, and above it all, Izuku can hear shouting, orders being given, and a male voice yelling, desperate and worried.

"Tenya!" The voice cries, and Izuku's blood runs cold as he looks over the scene, trying to find where he's sure he'll see Iida's broken body, maybe burned or crushed or just collapsed among the rubble and the flames and the Noumu, the giant, terrifying Noumu. Izuku isn't sure if there's smoke in his throat or something else as he listens to that hero call Iida's given name, over and over again.

"Stay back," another hero orders, whipping her hand out to stop Izuku from stepping closer. "The pros will handle this. Go follow evacuation orders!" she shouts, and Izuku realizes she thinks he's just another civilian. Izuku blinks, nodding, and he turns and runs before he can think about it. His brain is already assembling the pieces.

Stain and whoever Gekkeiju sent aren't here, he realizes, blood running cold. *Stain isn't here. Iida, whose brother was attacked by Stain, who took an internship in Hosu with a small agency, who hasn't really spoken to anyone since the attack, is missing.* Izuku grits his teeth and runs away from the battlefield, towards the small alleys and side streets that line the area. He doesn't know where Stain is, and it makes his heart clench in his chest because he also doesn't know who Fangirl is, doesn't know if Iida is even *alive*.

He supposes he was worrying for nothing, because the first thing he sees when he turns down an alleyway that is just a touch too loud, just too dark for Izuku *not* to turn down it, is Iida, on the ground under the foot of a man who is licking dark crimson blood off a sharp silver blade, his tongue too long and his face wrapped in filthy bandages. A scarf the same color as the blood flutters around his neck. Iida isn't moving, but he's yelling and breathing, so Izuku doesn't hesitate as he throws himself at Stain, knives already out just on instinct. He drives two blades into Stain's shoulder, shouting.

"Iida!" He screams, voice raw from the volume of it. "I'm here to save you!" He skitters back as Stain slashes out at him, barely missing, the air displaced by the knife whistling as Izuku pulls back, his own blades dripping with the Hero Killer's blood.

"How cute," a female voice says, a *familiar* one, and Izuku looks past Stain into the shadows, just in time to see Manami, dressed just the same as that night before in what looks like a school

uniform and thigh highs, her legs covered in self-harm wounds and her hand clutching that metal baseball bat that shines in the sunlight as she steps out of the darkness. Her amber eyes look different, and Izuku realizes, suddenly, that her pupils aren't heart-shaped, not this time. She has that same wicked grin on her face, but it doesn't reach quite as high, and in the sunlight, Izuku can see many, many pale, thin scars on her tanned skin. She looks at Izuku, and he feels a ripple of fear go through him before remembering that she *doesn't know him*.

"You're gonna save your friend?" She asks, tipping her head and reaching her free hand up to her face, her fingers hovering just centimeters above the skin of her cheek. "I'd like to see that," she murmurs, resting her hand on her face. Izuku watches as her form flickers, blurs and warps slightly as the edges of her shine rainbow colors. It fades just as quickly as it started, and Izuku can see that now her pupils are hearts once again, and that grin grows wider, sicker.

"Midoriya," Iida gasps from the ground. "I can't move since I got slashed. It must be his quirk." Izuku spares a glance down at him to see that his arm and cheek are cut, bleeding onto the ground. Izuku swallows, looking back up at Stain and Manami--no, *Fangirl*--as they watch him.

"I figured as much," he replies, his eyes glued to the villains in front of him. "I'm going to save you," he says, again, even though he has no earthly idea how he's going to take down two villains, essentially alone. Manami is looking at him as she runs her tongue over her top teeth, giggling, but it's Stain who speaks.

"That's a nice line," he says, "but I have a duty to kill this man. If you get in the way, it is the weak who will be killed." He meets Izuku's eyes and Izuku feels a shiver of some primal fear run like lightning along his spine. It's clear to Izuku that Stain is different, then from Shigaraki. He doesn't just want to destroy because he can, doesn't have that childish energy that Shigaraki has. His gaze is cold, and it is hungry. Izuku knows he has to fight him, if Iida is going to survive this.

"Midoriya," Iida grunts from his place on the ground, still under Stain's foot. "Get out of here. This doesn't concern you." Izuku blinks, frowning.

"Iida, I--" He shakes his head, cutting himself off. "Heroes have to know when to ask for help," he says, like he's said before in reference to himself. He's not going to let Iida die, not when he got here with enough time to *save* him.

"I'm not asking for your help," Iida spits out, and *oh*, Izuku blinks down at him, sees angry tears in his friend's eyes. "This doesn't concern you, Midoriya. Go *away*," he growls, angry and desperate and Izuku gives him a soft smile.

"You're not getting rid of me that easily," he says, voice soft, and that seems to be enough for Stain, because the Hero Killer is rushing forward in a movement that's so quick Izuku has to wonder how *that* isn't his quirk.

He whips out his sword so fast that it's a thin blur of light and blood as it whisks past Izuku, just over his head when he ducks and slides forward on the ground. It's one thing to fight against knives, but to fight against a sword, Izuku knows he can't stay too far back or he'll be out of his own range. Stain is chuckling as Izuku pulls up close, his own knives in hand.

"Closing the distance against a long-ranged weapon?" he asks, voice rough and low. "Smart." He reaches to his side, his hands wrapping around the hilt of a knife. Iida gasps from behind him.

"If you get cut--" he shouts, just as Izuku blocks the slash with his arm guard, the metal sliding harmlessly against the tough surface with a gritting noise. Stain *grins* his tongue poking out over his lips, and sends a shiver of cold fear through Izuku. He sees a blur of red and silver from behind

Stain, and it's all the warning he gets before Manami is reaching up, her bare hand touching the Hero Killer's neck, just three fingers. Izuku watches, dumbstruck, as Stain's form flickers in multicolor like Manami's had. The heart-shaped pupils that look creepy on Manami look *wrong wrong* on Stain, but not quite as much as the wicked grin that spreads across his face like the blood spilled on the sidewalk.

"Oh," Stain says, his voice a rumbling laugh that seems to flow out of him too fast, too strongly. "Oh, Fangirl, I *get it* now, I understand what you meant," he cackles, and when he swings his arm to slice at Izuku with the shorter knife, it's faster, so fast Izuku doesn't even see the motion until the knife is buried in his side, the sharp blade cutting right through his costume and digging into the flesh of his waist, just below his false ribs. The pain is sharp and hot, and when Stain pulls the blade back and runs his tongue along it, Izuku falls to the ground, limbs frozen and useless. All he can do is look where his head is pointed, up at Stain where he slowly, carefully cleans his blade with his tongue, chuckling and shaking as he does, his shoulder moving.

"Just stay having fun, 'kay?" Fangirl says, stepping past him to stare at Izuku, limbs like heavy stones on the cool concrete. "You know I can't turn it off, and I wouldn't want you to have a bad time!" She giggles, then stomps down on the concrete next to Izuku's head, cracking it as her foot sinks into it a few inches. Izuku swallows, roughly, because Manami has a quirk that lets her give people--herself included--super strength, it seems. And Stain has a quirk that paralyzes you if he eats your blood. And Izuku is frozen, pinned to the ground beside his friend. Izuku realizes, abruptly, he can barely even *breathe*, his body is so still, so unresponsive. He can hear his own labored breathing, rough and scratchy and too quiet, too shallow.

"This one was on Shigaraki's list, too, wasn't he?" Stain asks, and Manami shrugs, bouncing her baseball bat on the ground.

"Maybe. I dunno. I'm gonna kill him anyway! Why don't you help?" she asks, looking up at Stain with huge eyes and an even huger smile. "I can smash in his ribs and you can slit his throat!"

Stain scowls, his face dropping into something like disgust. "I don't kill for pleasure," he says, growling. "You should know, that, you insufferable--"

"Remember what I said about staying happy?" Manami bounces on her feet. "You've gotta keep it up, hmm? I'm not saying this for my benefit, you know." Stain narrows his eyes at her, then takes a deep breath. The same sick smile splits his face.

"I'll kill this one," Stain says, pointing his sword at Izuku's throat. "You can have the other one. This one at least *tried* to act as a hero should, even if he was too weak to back up his own words." Stain presses the sword, cool and razor-sharp to the flesh on Izuku's neck. Izuku can feel it press into his throat with every frantic heartbeat.

"Deal," Manami says, and it's the last thing Izuku hears as the sword is plunged into his neck, sending him straight into blackness.

--

Izuku opens his eyes with a gasp, blinking in the sudden artificial light of the train. A glance down at the empty granola bar wrapper in his hand tells him everything he needs to know, and he's on his feet and turning even before the Noumu crashes through the walls of the train.

"Deku!" Mirko shouts, getting to her feet and pulling him back, out of the way of the twisting metal and the flying debris.

“Let go of me!” He shouts, over the noise and the chaos and the Noumu ripping itself free from the wound in the train. “My friend is in danger,” he says, breathless, and Mirko lets go of him, a confused look on her face.

“What are you *talking* about?” She asks, giving him an incredulous look, but he’s jumping out of the train and running in Iida’s direction before she can try and stop him. He’s still full of adrenaline, messy and heavy and making his legs move faster than they would otherwise, and it’s probably because of that that he doesn’t even feel bad as he runs, completely ignoring the fighting and the carnage that surrounds him as he heads to that small, dark alleyway. As he runs, he pulls his phone from his pocket, grimacing when he realizes that he doesn’t know who’s in the area. He types out the address of the alley itself and sends it to all of his contacts, praying it’ll be enough as he shoves his phone back in his pocket.

He can see it, now, and he knows exactly what he’ll be running into but he doesn’t slow down, launching himself into the alleyway with a knife in each hand. He sees a scene that’s a little different than the last time; Iida is still standing, a dark look on his face as he glares at Stain.

“Iida,” Izuku breathes, and Iida whips around to face him. “His quirk paralyzes you if he tastes your blood.” Iida’s face is twisted with rage, so angry that it almost scares Izuku.

“What are you *doing* here?” Iida hisses, and Izuku has to rush forward and slam Iida out of the way of Stain’s sword so that his friend doesn’t get cut.

“Saving you,” Izuku says, flicking his wrist forward and feeling his blade cut into Stain’s hand as Izuku ducks forward, close to Stain’s body. He can feel the heat of Stain’s blood as it splashes onto his hand, but Stain doesn’t drop his sword, instead jerking it away as he steps back, a scowl on his lips.

“Another one?” He hisses, stepping back and twisting his sword forward, at Izuku’s face. Izuku blocks it with his arm guard, using his forearm to push the sword up and leave Stain open, but Stain just whips his other hand forward and Izuku swears as a thin blade slides past him, cutting a fine line in Izuku’s cheek. The blade flies past him, clattering to the ground somewhere behind him.

“That one’s on the list, too, I think,” Manami says, stepping out of the shadows. Her eyes are normal, and Izuku can see that she’s different. Calmer. “Lucky us, hmm Stainy?”

“Don’t call me that,” Stain hisses, and he’s throwing himself at Izuku. This time, it’s Iida who pushes Izuku out of the way, his friend shoving him aside and out of the way with a burst of his engines.

“Stay out of this,” Iida says, his voice almost a growl. “This isn’t any of your business.”

“It *is* my business if my friend is being attacked by villains,” Izuku fires back, dodging a quick swipe from Stain.

“*I attacked them*,” Iida replies, and *oh*. Izuku blinks, and the moment that he’s reeling from that, the moment that he’s distracted is enough because suddenly Stain is on him, his tongue rasping over the thin cut on Izuku’s cheekbone, and Izuku drops to the ground. It’s not quite as bad as last time, he notes dully as he lies on the concrete floor, straining to move but unable to command his limbs to do anything other than shake in place. *At least this time I can breathe*.

“Midoriya!” Iida shouts. “Are you okay?” Izuku thinks it’s a little late for Iida to worry about him, considering that he’d just told Izuku to go away while he attacked villains, probably for revenge,

but Izuku doesn't really mind.

"It's his quirk," Izuku repeats. "Like I said earlier. You need to run, go get help." Iida stares down at him, eyes wide and filled with flickering rage.

"I'm not going anywhere," he says. "I'm going to take down the man that hurt my brother." He looks back to Stain and Fangirl where they stand, side by side. Izuku can see Manami tipping her head to the side slightly, a thoughtful look on her face.

"Midoriya and... Iida, right?" She says, a small smile spreading over her lips. "I wonder just how angry little Iida is, hmm?" She darts forward, and her hand is on Iida's face, her fingers brushing the skin of his cheek even before he flinches. Izuku watches, paralyzed, as Iida's form flickers a rainbow blur and his pupils bend and warp, turning into tiny little hearts. Iida takes a step back and Manami copies him, skipping to stand behind Stain, who seems to just be watching. Izuku has a horrible, horrible feeling in his chest as he watches Iida's face change from surprise to fear to raw, pure anger.

Iida steps back into something that resembles a fighting stance and *screams*, an animalistic noise that Izuku would flinch away from if he could move at all. He can see the tears start to run down Iida's face, can see the way Iida starts to grip at his own hair, tugging on it harshly. His friend pauses, then shakes his head and looks at Stain, his lip curling in disgust and anger and *grief*.

"I'm going to kill you," Iida says and his voice is rough, raw. "I'm going to kill you and I'm going to do it slowly so that you know what it *feels* like. What it feels like for your idol to be..." Iida gasps, suddenly, his hands coming to his chest. "My brother..." he whispers, then drops to his knees, fresh tears running over his face and dripping off of his chin, onto the ground. Izuku can only watch in horror as Iida breaks down in front of the villains, breaks down as Stain watches and Manami *laughs*.

"I guess he was more sad than he was angry," Manami says, looking at Stain. "Do you wanna finish up here? I kind of want to..." she gestures at one of her hands with her other. "I'd like to *play*," she finishes, touching her own wrist with her fingers. Izuku sees her blur, just like before, her pupils going into hearts, and she giggles, grin deepening.

Stain sighs. "I don't understand the point of asking if you were going to do it before I answered," he says. "But I can take care of these two brats." He glances over at Izuku, still frozen on the concrete. "I'll be merciful and do it quickly," he adds, more to Izuku than to Manami.

"Okay!" She replies, singsong, and she steps forward to leave the alley, but she doesn't get very far. A curtain of gold and orange flame flares forward, curling around the edge of the alleyway and washing over Stain and Manami's feet. They both hop back.

"It's one after another today," Stain growls, and Izuku lets out a breath he hadn't been holding when it's Todoroki's voice he hears behind him.

"Midoriya," he says, voice stern. "Next time, send me more than just a location. I'm late." Izuku almost sobs at relief when he sees his friend's legs step into view, sees him raise both hands in a fighting stance, ready to protect him and Iida.

"Their quirks," Izuku says from his place on the ground, and he sees Todoroki glance down at him. "If Stain ingests your blood, it paralyzes you. If Man--Fangirl touches you, it makes you like *that*," he finishes, looking at Iida and hoping Todoroki gets the message.

"Got it," he replies, raising a hand wreathed in bright flame. "Don't worry, in a few minutes, the

pros will arrive, too. I'll just have to keep my distance until then." Izuku swallows as Todoroki waves his hand, a bright stream of flame rushing out and at Stain. He sees something, a twist of silver within the gold and red, and then Todoroki is stumbling back, blood running down the side of his neck, reflecting the light of his flames.

"Shit," Todoroki says, under his breath, and Izuku can't help but agree with that sentiment. At that moment, Iida lets out another scream, tipping his head back where he's sitting on the ground.

"Get *away* from here!" he cries, shouting at Todoroki. "I don't want your help! I don't want either of you here," he says, face red and breath coming in pants. "I inherited my brother's name," he says. "I'm the one... I'm the one who has to--"

"Funny," Todoroki says, voice dry. "I've never seen Ingenium making a face like that." Izuku watches a look of pure, utter horror wash over Iida's face, just moments before a metal baseball bat swings, seemingly out of nowhere, crashing into Iida's side and sending him flying. Manami is standing, just a few feet from Todoroki, a lazy smirk on her face and soft laughter bubbling in her throat.

"It's like--" She stops, suddenly bending over to laugh. Todoroki lobbs a set of ice spears at her, but she easily dodges, moving like a puppet yanked on invisible strings. "God, it's like free television! Do you guys even listen to yourselves?" She keeps on *laughing*, her voice loud in the alleyway even over the crackle of Todoroki's fire. Izuku thinks that's why he sees Stain before Todoroki does.

"Todoroki!" he shouts, just as Todoroki raises an arm to block his face, three throwing knives sticking into the meat of his forearm. Izuku is close enough to hear the way he hisses in pain as Stain charges into him, knocking him over with ease and licking his long tongue along the bright red blood that flows from Todoroki's arm. It's a familiar sight, almost, except last time one of them had an arm cut open and bleeding, Izuku was on the floor of a bathroom.

This time, Todoroki falls to the ground, anger on his face and blood on his sleeve. Izuku twitches an arm toward him, then remembers he shouldn't be able to move as he hauls himself to his feet, staring at his friends, both on the ground. Iida isn't moving, and his chest looks... wrong. Manami steps out from where she's standing behind Stain.

"Oh, just this one left?" Manami coos, swinging her bat at him in a wide arc that he dodges away from because she's thrown it at him before. "I wonder what happens if I kill the others and make you watch, hmm? Would you cry?" She giggles, then she's moving forward so quickly Izuku can't keep his eyes on her. He only knows where she is because the baseball bat crushes his shoulder, and he can both hear and feel the way the bones there, his arm and his collarbone all in one, shatter and crush under the impact. Izuku isn't sure if he's screaming, or if that's Iida again. He's not even sure if his eyes are still open or not, because he can't see through the pain.

"Kill me," he says, gasping. "Kill me, *please*," he begs, because with his shoulder destroyed like this there's no way he can get Iida and Todoroki out of there, even if Iida's still alive. His vision clears just in time to see Manami grin, wide enough that it presses her eyes into little crescents above her flushed cheeks.

"Gladly," she purrs, and Izuku sees the bat coming down on his head.

cw: self harm wounds mentioned

discord: <https://discord.gg/Vqaj62ceCt>

as always thank you SO MUCH for the support!! it really means a TON!! sorry for the short a/n tonight, im really tired rip

internship, part 4

Chapter Summary

last time: izuku found iida fighting stain and manami/fangirl and died! then he brought todoroki to the scene.... and died again.

Chapter Notes

HI GUYS SO I MADE A BIG MISTAKE.... i forgot la brava existed.... and then made an oc with the same first name as her.... and the same hair style and hair/eye color.... and somewhat similar quirks..... whoops. none of that was intentional and any resemblance to la brava is a huge accident DFGHDFG so just. yeah. im a clown <3

school started up again today and so far it looks like it'll be chill enough for me to keep updating at my usual rate though so that's good!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Izuku opens his eyes on the train again, the pain fast fading from where it had still been clinging to his shoulder and ribs. He turns to Mirko as he jumps to his feet.

“I-I need your help,” he says, the exact second the Noumu crashes into the train in that crash of metal and light. Izuku keeps his gaze on Mirko, on her red eyes as they widen in surprise.

“Deku, what--” She starts, but Izuku cuts her off, shaking his head.

“There’s no time to explain,” he says, biting his lip. “My friend is in danger and I need your help.” Mirko blinks, then nods, and that’s all Izuku needs to turn and start running from the train, past where the Noumu is clinging to it. Mirko launches out of the train moments later, a kick colliding with the Noumu’s face and dislodging it from the body of the train, sending it crashing into the street below in a heap of grey skin and strange, misshapen limbs. Izuku pulls out his phone and hits call on Todoroki’s contact, switching it to speaker phone as Mirko lands beside him.

“I need to explain to both of you at once,” Izuku says, the phone ringing between them as he starts toward the alleyway. Mirko runs beside him, keeping pace with him even though he knows she could go faster.

“Yeah, you’d better have one hell of an explanation,” she hisses, but Izuku thinks it’s worry he sees on her face, not anger. Izuku is saved from having to say something by the sound of Todoroki picking up.

“Midoriya?” He sounds annoyed. “I’m on patrol with my father, can this--”

“It can’t,” Izuku says, interrupting him. “I need you to come to the alleyway by Ekou street, 4-2-10. Iida is fighting the Hero Killer and a member of the Gekkeiju, and if we don’t get there in time

he *will* die.” Izuku has to pause to leap from one roof to another, breathing out sharply as the motion stings his knees.

“What?” Todoroki says, then, “I’m on my way. What else can you tell me?” Izuku hears the vague sound of Todoroki speaking to someone else, away from the receiver.

“Stain’s quirk paralyzes you if he tastes your blood,” he says, glancing at Mirko who nods, her eyes on where she’s going but her ears angled ever-so-slightly toward Izuku. “M--Fangirl, that’s the other one, I don’t know what her quirk is, but don’t let her touch you. It’s something that enhances emotions and maybe strength but last--” Izuku shakes his head. “If she touches one of us, it’ll end badly,” he finishes instead. He hates the way he’s letting things slip, the way he’s telling them all of this without a good reason to know any of it, but Izuku knows from having done it twice now that the fight with Stain and Fangirl lasts mere minutes. One slip up will end with him or his friends dead.

“How do you know all of this?” Todoroki asks, voice distorted by sounds of motion on the other end of the line. Izuku bites his lip.

“Tida texted me,” he says, the lie coming easily. “You want more than just a location, don’t you?” He sees Mirko shoot him a glance from where she’s drawing slightly ahead of him, no doubt headed to the address he’d just given Todoroki.

“Yes,” Todoroki hisses, “this is better than just a location, but--” Izuku cuts him off.

“I gotta go, we’re getting close,” he says. “Bye, Todoroki.” Izuku fumbles with his phone, moving to hang up.

“Midoriya, wait--” Todoroki’s voice cuts off as Izuku hangs up, shoving the phone back into his pocket and drawing his knives instead as the alleyway comes into view. He’s not sure if it took extra time to alert them, if he was slower or faster than last time, and some part of him is scared that he’ll get there and see Iida already dead, already collapsed onto the ground. Izuku doubts that, even if Iida is fine, they’ll be successful this run through. He thinks that on some level, he’s expecting to die. Maybe that’s why he doesn’t mind that he’s saying far more than he should, or maybe it’s the sleep deprivation and the desperation that’s making him careless.

“You’re gonna be answering a lot of questions when this is over,” Mirko says, jumping from the last rooftop onto the ground in front of the alley, her white hair whipping at the movement. Izuku stores away *that* anxiety for later as he climbs down the last fire escape, gritting his teeth when he hears the sounds of fighting before he’s even all the way to the ground.

“Midoriya, what are you doing here?” Iida hisses just as he steps back, out of the alley and into view. “What have you done?”

“I brought you help so you don’t get yourself killed,” Izuku says back to him, pushing past him and into the alley itself.

The scene he sees is vastly different from last time, most notably because it includes his mentor lobbing a kick directly into Stain’s face, sending the villain skittering back a few steps as he hisses and slashes his sword forward, at Mirko’s arms. Mirko dodges with a spinning jump, propelling herself up to jump from the wall of one building to another, Stain’s sword a silver blur that chases her. Izuku steps into the alleyway and flicks his wrist out, throwing some of his smaller knives at Stain. It would have hit, he thinks, but Stain dodges out of the way of it and turns his gaze to Izuku.

“Another child?” He asks, then copies Izuku’s last move, throwing a knife out. The difference is

that he throws it far faster, far more skillfully than Izuku ever could have, and it rushes at Izuku's arm. Izuku manages to deflect it with his arm guards, but the motion leaves him open. He sees Mirko move to keep Stain away from him at the same time Manami steps out from the shadow. Izuku grits his teeth.

"Mirko, behind you!" he shouts, and Mirko reacts instantly, sliding back out of the way of Manami's baseball bat as she swings it down, a wide grin on her face.

"Oh, bunny ears!" Manami says, swaying back and out of the way of a swift punch Mirko throws at her. "You remind me of someone I know."

"Yeah? Who's that?" Mirko quips back, sweeping a foot forward at Manami's legs. Izuku wants to keep watching, but Stain's coming at him with a sword in one hand and a knife in the other, and he needs all of his attention focused to dodge out of the sword swipe and slide in close while blocking the smaller blade, thrusting his own knife towards Stain's chest. He knows from the past fights that Stain moves a certain way, tends to move quick and neat, so it's easier than it should be for Izuku to dodge Stain's follow up swipe and use the movement to knee the man in the stomach. Stain hardly grunts, though, his eyes narrowing ever so slightly behind the bandages.

"You fight well, little hero," Stain growls, and he's darting forward as Izuku moves back, feeling a blade come so close to the skin of his face that he's sure for a second he's cut. He slides out of the way, bringing up a hand to feel his cheek, relieved to find no blood there. Stain's already moving, though swiping his sword at Izuku again, and out of the corner of Izuku's eye, he can see the colorful distortion of Manami using her quirk on herself, her laughs growing louder and wilder. Izuku bites his lip as he realizes, time moving almost in slow motion, that he isn't going to be able to get his arm guards up in time to block this attack, to guard against the sword coming for his chest. Izuku braces himself for the pain, but he keeps his eyes open, so he sees the brilliant whip of red flame that shoots between Izuku and Stain, causing the villain to pull back with a scowl.

"The roaches just keep on coming," he growls just as Izuku grins, stepping back to stand beside Todoroki.

"Thanks for coming," Izuku says, and Todoroki just gives him a look with one raised brow.

"Why wouldn't I?" he replies, rearing back and throwing a blast of glowing flame at Stain. "I see that you've had the sense to contact a pro as well." Todoroki dodges back away from Stain's blade as it comes at him.

"Yeah, well," Izuku says, darting forward to draw the edge of his blade along the underside of Stain's outstretched arm. "I figured four on two would be better." Stain growls, whipping his other arm forward, and Izuku can't help the little squeak he lets out as a throwing knife he hadn't even seen buries itself in his stomach, just above his right hip bone. Todoroki sends him a wall of ice, and Izuku takes the chance, moving back as he presses a hand to the bleeding wound in his gut, the knife still embedded in him. It burns sharp, like hot fire, but he knows not to take the blade out.

"Deku!" Mirko shouts, but Izuku can't see her or Iida because of the ice wall in front of him. "Was that you? Are you okay?" Izuku hears a metallic clank, then the ice wall shatters and Manami is flying forward through the shards, her baseball bat smeared with dark blood. Izuku braces himself and blocks her incoming hit with both forearms, and he winces when he hears his reinforced guards crack and strain under the force. The force of the hit is unnatural, and Izuku feels pain radiate through both of his arms as he shoves forward at Manami, forcing her to step back.

"I'm okay!" he shouts back at Mirko, who he can see fighting Stain out of the corner of his eye, with Iida throwing a kick to Stain's back and Mirko rushing in with an elbow strike that hits

Stain's chest but doesn't avoid the blade he sticks out at the last moment, cutting a thin stripe up the length of Mirko's arm. Izuku has to look away, tearing his eyes from his friend and his mentor, as Fangirl swings her bat at him again, this time from the side. Izuku dodges inward, so her wrists contact his side instead of the bat, and even though he only gets a fraction of the force of her hit, it's enough to knock the breath out of him. He gasps for breath, grateful when Todoroki shoves Manami away from him with a swell of ice that rises from the ground.

"Fuck!" Mirko shouts, and Izuku doesn't have to look to know she's downed by Stain's quirk, but he does anyway, seeing her on her stomach on the ground, Stain standing in front of her and clicking the underside of his knife. He must have gotten some of Iida's blood, too, because Iida is in a similar position and his shoulder is bleeding, badly. Izuku grits his teeth.

"Todoroki, you take Stain," he says. "You've got more ranged attacks than I do. Don't underestimate him," Izuku says, glancing at Todoroki just as Todoroki nods, stepping forward and away from Manami without a second glance. Izuku turns back to Manami, who's watching him, humming quietly under her breath.

"Aren't you underestimating *me*, kiddo?" She asks, bouncing the bloody bat against the palm of her hand. Izuku thinks, briefly, that she must have gotten Iida's shoulder. It looks like his would have, last time.

"I don't have much of a choice, do I?" he says in reply, readying his blades as she takes a step forward. He dodges under her strike, but when he goes to slash at her throat, she just laughs, slamming a knee up into his stomach, and Izuku realizes the attack with the baseball bat had just been a feint. He can *hear* more than feel his ribs cracking, and it's not from quirk overuse when he drops to and throws up, blood streaking through the vomit. He looks up, adrenaline flashing through his veins as he readies himself to be hit in the head or the shoulder or anything, but what he sees is Manami's hand moments before it touches his face.

Izuku feels the cool, gentle touch first, then a sensation like he's being shaken, like he's on a rollercoaster that just dropped down the biggest hill. His vision blurs, rainbow colors bleeding into every motion anything makes, and then he feels his fear, sharp and loud already, grow in a way that makes his heart stutter and shake in his chest. He feels like his chest is ripping open, like he can't breathe and like he's choking on something, horrible and heavy and sour blood in his throat or maybe just in his mind.

He hears someone scream, raw and terrified and awful, and he knows it's him because he can feel his throat aching at the force of it, but he can't make himself stop, not until he's thrown to the ground, Manami's backhand bruising his cheek and sending him flying across the concrete. Something that feels like anger flashes through him, but it doesn't compare to the thick, heavy curtain of fear. His vision is still rainbow edged, like the blurs that come with motion are tinted in colors, but he's able to bring himself to his feet, somehow, even with the way he thinks his heart is going to catch fire and burn from the sheer speed it's beating. Manami laughs at him.

"God, you're really, honestly, just scared, huh? I thought you'd be angry or, I dunno, *determined* or something, but it's all just fear." Manami cackles, tipping her head back and resting the heel of one palm on her forehead. "It's going to be *so* much fun to watch you die," she says, then drops her hand and lunges at him.

Izuku doesn't know what happens when he goes to dodge, but it's like the world stutters, briefly, just for a heartbeat, and he moves quicker than he's ever moved before, his legs stronger and quicker than they've been, even when he's injured like he is. It surprises him, and the surprise is stronger and brighter than he's ever felt, but it's enough to lessen the cold claws of fear that grip

him, and he's able to press himself against the wall of the alleyway and glance to the side, where he sees Mirko pulling herself up off the ground and Todoroki standing, covered in blood as he breathes himself in fire to keep Stain back.

"Hey, pay attention to *me!*" Manami says, giggling, and Izuku turns back at her just in time to sidestep the punch she throws. Where it hits the wall behind him, the bricks crack and break, crumbling. Izuku grits his teeth and feels something bitter and hot and not angry but *close* fills him, and he lashes out with a messy punch. It misses, because it was stupid and poorly aimed, and it leaves him open enough for Manami to drop her baseball bat and reach up to grab his neck, easily holding him off the ground in a bruising grip.

"God, you're a quick one, aren't you?" She coos, squeezing his throat enough that his head feels like it's under pressure, tight and full of blood as his heart frantically beats in his chest. His fear from before comes back at full strength, mixed with a crushing sense that he fucked up, that he should have been faster. That he should have been *better*. Izuku writhes in her grip, gasping for air as black spots fill in his vision, but the only thing on his mind is that he deserves to die this time. He'd been the one to bring Todoroki and Mirko here to get hurt, and he'd been the one to throw the stupid punch that had gotten him in this position anyway. Izuku suddenly, desperately, just wants it to be *over*. He drops his hands from where Manami is holding him, flicking his wrist on his right hand and pulling out one of his hidden knives.

He's not even sure she sees him as he twists, driving the knife into the flesh of her wrist. She yelps, dropping him to the ground, and Izuku wants to use the chance to hit her again, but all he can do is sit on the ground, knees on the cold concrete and gasp for breath, huge, wheezing gasps that make him dizzy. The guilt that he feels is overwhelming, heavy and sickening and it makes Izuku pick up his knife and stick out his arm, driving the tip of the already bloody knife into the flesh just above the arm guards.

For a second, just a second, he feels that blissful wave of nothing, of numbness and euphoria that comes with this, and it must be that that breaks the quirk, because when that instant ends, things are clear again. Colors are no longer too-bright, no longer tinted multicolor, and his emotions feel normal, feel *calm* compared. He's still guilty, still scared, but he can also look up and focus enough to see Stain's unconscious body on the ground, surrounded by ice, and to watch as Manami leaps away from a kick Mirko sends at her, landing atop a roof nearby.

"See ya next time!" She shouts, waving, then rushes away. Izuku can see Mirko jerk, like she's going to chase after her, but something stops her, and she turns back to look directly at Izuku.

"Shit, kid, what the hell?" She hisses, rushing over to him. Izuku blinks, then looks down to see that he'd cut his own arm a little deeper than he'd meant to, and now he's bleeding all over the ground.

"Oops," he says. "I-I was trying to break her quirk, and I guess it worked, but..." he trails off. It's a good excuse, really, definitely better than telling Mirko that he just felt really really bad and this is what he does when he feels bad.

"Midoriya, are you okay?" Todoroki asks, walking over to look him over just as Mirko puts pressure on the cut on his wrist. Izuku brushes her hand away, replacing it with his own and struggling to his feet. His neck and stomach ache, and he's definitely, definitely got some broken ribs, but for now, adrenaline seems to be enough to keep him on his feet.

"I'm okay," he answers, looking Todoroki over. "Are you?" His friend is covered in cuts, most of them shallow, but he's bleeding quite a bit. His hand is clamped on his upper arm, holding pressure to a knife wound. Todoroki nods.

"I'm fine. Iida's awake, but his arm is..." Todoroki trails off as Izuku pushes past him, staring at where Iida is resting against the wall. His arm is crushed, like Izuku's was last reset, but Manami must have hit him lower down than she hit Izuku because it looks like his collarbone has been spared most of the impact. Iida is staring at the ground, glasses missing and his eyes full of tears.

"Midoriya," he says, and Izuku steps toward him. "I'm sorry. I got so caught up in my head that I-" He shakes his head, biting his lip. "Todoroki was right," he breathes, and even though Izuku has no idea what Todoroki said to Iida this time around, he nods.

"It's okay, Iida," he says in reply, his voice raspy and strange sounding. "What matters is that you're safe." Iida looks up at him, and Izuku gives him a small smile, but Iida gasps.

"Midoriya, your throat..." He shakes his head, and Izuku reaches a hand up to feel the skin of his neck. It stings when he touches it, and it feels swollen and hot, but it's not that bad. The pain at the base of his ribs, in his stomach, is far worse, but Izuku doesn't want to say that.

"It's probably better than it looks," Izuku offers, and Iida just sighs, looking back down at the ground. Izuku wants to say something to comfort him, but he's not sure he knows how.

"Deku," Mirko calls, and Izuku turns to see her and Todoroki wrapping a length of rope around Stain. "You should sit down," she says, jerking her head at where Iida sits.

Izuku shakes his head. "I'm fine," he insists, even as his stomach rolls strangely and something warm and coppery rises in his throat. It must show on his face, because he blinks and suddenly Mirko is right in front of him, hands on his shoulders and guiding him to the ground. Izuku coughs, weakly, and he leans to the side to spit up the blood in his mouth.

"Shit," Mirko curses, and Izuku blinks up at her.

"M okay," he says, his voice slurring. He realizes, vaguely, that this is the adrenaline wearing off, but it doesn't make it any easier to stay awake as his eyes are suddenly drooping, his stomach burning and aching with every breath. He feels his eyes slide shut, feels hands lowering him to the ground, moving him into the recovery position, and then he loses consciousness.

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When Izuku opens his eyes, he feels the world shifting and moving strangely before his vision focuses. He blinks, taking in the way he can see white hair and hear Mirko talking, and realizes he's on her back, draped across her shoulders in a fireman's carry.

"Mirko?" he asks, voice thick and slurred still, but it must be clear, because he feels the arm wrapped around his leg squeeze gently.

"Hey, Deku, welcome back," Mirko says, and Izuku can see the edge of her face if he twists just right.

"What's going on?" Izuku asks, straining to look up, but he doesn't get very far, his stomach and ribs throbbing in protest. Mirko's grip on him tightens, but not to the point of pain.

"We're getting you kids to where the ambulances can reach, and we're getting Stain to the cops so his ass can go rot in jail," Mirko answers. "How are you feeling?"

"Okay," Izuku replies, because it's not totally a lie. He mostly feels very, very tired and also like his chest and stomach are on fire. Mirko hums in response, and she definitely doesn't sound like she believes him, but that's okay.

“Iida and Todoroki,” Izuku says, pausing to breathe, which is kind of embarrassing to have to do, “are they okay?”

“They’re both fine,” Mirko says. “You have the worst injuries out of everyone. Both of them are walking; they’re right behind us.” She leans her head back. “Right, guys?”

“Right,” Todoroki echoes.

“We’re both here,” Iida says, voice sounding troubled. “I’m so sorry, Midoriya, it’s my fault you’re injured.”

“No, it’s Stain and Fangirl’s,” Izuku replies, almost laughing but not willing to risk hurting his ribs any more than breathing alone already does. “Not your fault.”

“Still, I--” Iida is cut off by a shout from someone in front of them, a hero that Izuku remembers seeing when he’d run into the scene of the battle the first time. She points up at the sky and yells,

“Watch out!” Izuku doesn’t see the Noumu, but he certainly feels it when it grips him at the waist, ripping him out of Mirko’s grip and into the sky.

“Midoriya!” Iida shouts and the same time that Mirko yells his hero name, and Izuku blinks, the cool air whipping around him as he’s lifted higher and higher. He twists in the Noumu’s grasp, his ribs and stomach burning at the movement, but he’s able to sink his teeth into the Noumu’s foot where it’s gripping him tightly. He doesn’t have his costume fangs in--he’d had them out to eat on the train and never got the chance to put them back in--but it must startle the Noumu, or hurt it a little, or *something*, because in the next heartbeat Izuku is falling through the air, something that tastes like rotten in his mouth.

Izuku isn’t sure what happens next, exactly, because whoever catches him does so *right* where his broken ribs are, and his vision goes fuzzy and dark for a few minutes. He hears someone talking, someone with a voice that’s too familiar to him and that he knows he should be afraid of, but that same person is pinning him to the ground in a way that presses his injury into the concrete and Izuku can’t breathe, let alone think. He’s released, suddenly, and Izuku takes one moment just to gasp, using the next to turn over.

What he sees should surprise him, but Izuku doesn’t think he has it in him to be surprised right now, not with the way his chest feels like it’s ripped open and the way his throat is burning, swollen and hot. He sees Stain, glaring back at him, at the heroes behind him. He sees a reflection of fire, bright and big in Stain’s eyes. He thinks he might even see the *malice*, the anger and hatred and *pain* coming off of Stain.

“Another phony,” he growls. “The fake must be rectified. Someone must stain himself with his blood.” His voice rises, louder and rougher with each word. “The word hero must be restored!” He stomps forward, his foot slamming onto the ground not far from where Izuku is laying.

“Come!” the Hero Killer screams. “Just try, you pretenders! The only one who is allowed to kill me is All Might!” Izuku shivers, trying to scoot himself back, to move away from Stain before he can attack, but he doesn’t need to.

“He’s lost consciousness,” someone breathes from behind him, and Izuku swallows, heart pounding in his chest.

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Izuku must have passed out at some point after that, even though he doesn’t recall exactly when,

because the next thing he knows, he's in the hospital. He blinks his eyes open, staring up at the IV bag that's slowly dripping a clear liquid into a tube. The lights here are different from the ones in the UA infirmary, so he knows he's at a real hospital, but somehow that doesn't make him feel better.

"Midoriya?" Todoroki's voice makes Izuku blink, and he turns his head to the side to see Iida and Todoroki sitting on hospital beds in the same room as him, each of them wearing hospital gowns. Iida has a blue cast covering his entire left arm, and both of them have a fair number of bandages, but other than that, they seem to be fine.

"Hi," Izuku says, sitting up and blinking to clear the sleep from his eyes. "Did I miss anything important?"

"Depends on if you remember when the Noumu picked you up or not," a familiar voice says from behind him, and Izuku turns to see Mirko leaning on the doorway, arms crossed over her chest. There's a bandage on her arm and another on her face, but she looks almost completely uninjured.

"I-I do," Izuku says, biting his lip and looking back over at his friends. Todoroki gives him a nod. Mirko sighs from the doorway.

"I'm supposed to let you know that you've got a 'visitor' waiting," she makes air quotes, rolling her eyes, "but I'm not gonna tell them you're all awake until you're ready." She looks to Izuku as she says it. "You've been out for around eight hours, by the way."

Izuku nods, biting his lip and looking down at his chest. He can't see anything under the hospital gown, but he can feel the tight bandages wrapped around him, and he has no doubt that the IV going into the crook of his left arm is giving him some pretty powerful painkillers. He frowns, then reaches up to his throat, feeling gauze there, too.

"I can't believe we made it," he breathes, not really intending to say it out loud. It has more weight than the others know, even when Iida nods and glances at his own shoulder. Todoroki is still the one who speaks, though.

"I think it would have been worse if Stain wasn't there," he comments, looking at his arm where there's a tightly bound bandage. "It was almost like he was holding back the other villain." He looks to Iida. "You faced both of them alone before we got there, right? I'm impressed." He smiles, ever so slightly. "I was supposed to come to your rescue and all I did was struggle."

Iida blinks, looking down at his lap. "I'm... it's not..." He trails off, his lips pressed into a thin line.

"It's okay, Iida," Izuku says, keeping his voice gentle. "We don't have to talk about it if you're not ready." He sees Todoroki nod in agreement, and after a second, Iida nods as well, clenching his uninjured arm in the fabric of his hospital gown.

"Do you guys think you can take that visitor now?" Todoroki asks. "I want to get it over with." He doesn't look nervous, per say, but Izuku thinks there's something like apprehension on his face, under his normal cool expression.

"I'm okay with it," Izuku replies and Iida takes a deep breath, then wipes his arm over his eyes and looks up.

"I am as well," Iida says, his blue eyes catching Izuku's gaze for just a second. Izuku holds the eye contact for just a heartbeat, then looks over to Mirko, who nods, then leans out of the doorway, angling her head to look down the hallway.

“Hey, they’re all awake!” She calls, voice too loud for a hospital. Izuku winces, hoping that there aren’t any other patients nearby for her to wake up. She shifts, looking back in at them, then smiles sympathetically.

“Good luck, brats. I don’t know the details, but...” She meets Izuku’s eyes. “They’re concerned about a couple of things. I’ll be right here with you.” Izuku wonders why she would be worried, but he doesn’t have time to think about it because Mirko steps into the room and leans against the wall beside the door just as two figures walk in, both in neat suits. One has the head of a dog and the other looks plain, with black hair and brown eyes. They’re both wearing badges, though, and it’s clear to Izuku that they’re police officers.

“Hello,” the dog one says, his voice a little bit odd. “I am Chief Tsuragamae, ruff. I’m here to talk to you about the events that took place earlier today.” He glances over them, raising a hand when they all start to stand. Izuku is kind of stuck on the ‘ruff’ thing, actually, but he’s also nervous.

“You can all remain seated,” he says, a light chuckle in his voice. “I know you’ve been through quite a lot.” He glances to the plain looking man at his side. “This is Detective Tsukauchi. He’ll be asking you a few questions after this is all over, but first I’d like to talk about the Hero Killer and the villain Fangirl.” Izuku stiffens, and he can feel the tension in the room rise with their names.

“The Hero Killer sustained injuries, and is currently being treated for broken bones, knife wounds, and burns, among other things,” Tsuragamae says, makes eye contact with each of them in turn. “Since quirks first showed themselves in our society, the police have made it a point to not use them as weapons. Rather, heroes rose to fulfill that niche in society, and naturally, rules were created to make sure that those without good intentions or control over their powers did not use their quirks at their own discretion.” His gaze pauses on Izuku for just a moment longer, before he stares at Todoroki and Iida. “In order to maintain the balance of things, if some were to choose to use their quirks against another without proper licensure, even if their enemies were, say, the Hero Killer himself, they would be held liable.” Izuku feels a shiver run down his spine, but it’s Todoroki who jumps to his feet.

“Do you think they would have just let Iida live if he turned and walked away from them?” Todoroki says, stepping toward the chief. “Do you think he would have survived if Midoriya hadn’t gotten Mirko and I to help him? We had supervision, and it was a life-threatening scenario, and you’re saying we should have just stepped back? Do you think Mirko could have held her own against them while protecting the three of us?” Todoroki is practically hissing, and Izuku gets to his feet, ready to stop him, but it’s Mirko who actually does. She sticks an arm out, between Chief Tsuragamae and Todoroki.

“Kid, I get your point, but let the dude finish. He’s getting somewhere.” She makes eye contact with Todoroki, it looks like, and after a moment of tense staring, Todoroki steps back with a huff.

Tsuragamae sighs. “You are really just children, after all.” He brings a hand to his muzzle, like he’s thinking. “That’s what I am required to say as the chief of police. As for my actual opinion...” He pauses, glancing at Izuku with a slight smile on his face. “One of you saw that his friend was in danger, contacted his mentor and his peer, and asked for help. I don’t think any disciplinary action is necessary, so long as this is kept out of the eye of the public, that is.” He sighs. “Unfortunately, it was still illegal for Iida and Todoroki to use their quirks without their own mentors present. However, so long as it is not publicly known that you two were involved, there should be no effects on your reputation or records as shining heroes to be.” He smiles at them, then gives a thumbs up.

“After all, I wouldn’t want something like this *dogging* your records when all you were trying to do

was help each other!” He nods to them, still smiling. “So, while you may not be able to receive the public praise you deserve...” he bows to them, a quick motion. “I, at least, would like to thank you for your good work, as someone who aims to protect the people.” He stays bowed for a moment before straightening up, and the room is silent for a few moments, at least until Todoroki sighs, stepping back to plop back onto the bed.

“Say that right out of the gate, next time,” he mutters, and Izuku can't help the laugh that bubbles out of him at the pout on his friend's face.

“Ah, there is one more thing,” Tsukauchi says, an apologetic smile on his face. “I'd like to ask you a few questions in private, Midoriya. It shouldn't take but a moment.” Izuku looks at him, but really, he's processing the way Mirko scowls, her brows furrowing with worry and frustration. He swallows, because something in his chest tells him that this isn't something he wants happening.

“S-Sure,” he says, voice cracking slightly. “Um, right now?”

Tsukauchi nods. “It's best to get this over with,” he answers, then steps toward Izuku, offering him a hand. “Come. There's a room just down the hall we've gotten permission to use.”

Izuku nods, taking his hand and letting the detective help him to his feet, but he can't say he feels all that reassured by the man's soft smile or soothing voice. It certainly doesn't help that Mirko is still frowning as she trails after them, arms folded over her chest.

Chapter End Notes

cw: vomiting, self harm, hospitals

thank you as always for the support and the comments!!!! i apologize again for the dumb mistake with la brava, i am really very embarrassed about the whole thing. hopefully the chapter was good enough to make up for it!!

discord: <https://discord.gg/Vqaj62ceCt>

post internships

Chapter Summary

last time: izuku got mirko and todoroki to help him fight stain and fangirl! he got hit by fangirl's quirk and nabbed by a noumu for a hot second but it's okay. now he's in the hospital recovering, but detective tsukauchi wants to talk to him

Chapter Notes

hi guys!! i feel like this one kinda sucks ngl so apologies in advance. i've been suppppppper busy today so haven't had as much time to write as i like.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

When Izuku sits down in the plush armchair, facing Tsukauchi where he sits across a coffee table in a matching chair, both of them with steaming cups of hot cocoa in front of them, it's not exactly what Izuku had expected an interrogation to look like. *Because that's what this is, isn't it? I know things I shouldn't and they need to know why*. Izuku doesn't think he's a fan of the concept. Tsukauchi looks up at Mirko, who's hovering by the closed door, still standing.

"We're good here, now," he says, giving her a polite smile. "I'll let you know when we're finished." Mirko narrows her eyes at him, scowling.

"Like hell I'm leaving him alone in here with you," she says, folding her arms over her chest and leaning against the wall beside the door. There's a window there, but the blinds are down. "The kid just survived two fucking villains and got his ribs fuckin' crushed. He shouldn't have to sit for a goddamn interrogation the day of."

Tsukauchi's smile drops. "It really is better to get it over with while his memory is still fresh," he says, his eyes darting over to Izuku for a moment. Izuku tries to smile at him but it turns into more of a grimace.

"I-I'd be okay with Mirko staying," he says, fidgeting with his hands in front of him. The IV he's still hooked up to drips rhythmically beside him. "If that's okay."

"It is if you consent to it," Tsukauchi says, pulling out a notebook from a bag beside him. "I'm okay with it. This is really just to clear some things up, so it should go fairly quickly," he says, smiling again as he clicks his pen open and opens the notebook to a blank page.

"Right," Izuku replies, not believing him in the slightest. Tsukauchi rests his pen above the page of his notebook.

"Now, I'm going to tell you right out of the gate what my quirk does," he says, meeting Izuku's gaze. "I'm able to tell if someone is telling the truth or not. It's an ability that cannot be turned off, and thus I will be using it in our conversation. It's in your best interest to tell the truth, anyway, but I prefer not to use it without people understanding what they are walking into." Izuku swallows,

because that just made the situation a lot more dire. He tries not to let his nerves show on his face though, instead tipping his head slightly to the side and widening his eyes.

“Whoa, that’s amazing!” he says, honestly. “How does it work when the person you’re asking thinks something is true, but it isn’t? Does it seem true because they think it does? Or does it show up as a lie because it’s wrong?” It’s not hard for Izuku to start thinking about the quirk, really, not when it’s genuinely such an interesting one. “Does it show up as a lie when people say stuff like ‘nice to meet you’ but they’re just being polite? Oh, what if something is an opinion, so it’s neither true nor false?”

Tsukauchi blinks, then chuckles. “I detect truth versus lies, not correct versus incorrect, so it’s based on what the person I’m asking thinks is true,” he replies, smiling. “As for things people say to be polite, sometimes it will show up as a lie, yes, but generally I don’t take offense to it. Opinions show up as true if the person is being honest about their opinion and false if they aren’t. I can tell you more about my quirk after we talk, if you’d like,” he says, and Izuku nods, recognizing that Tsukauchi probably won’t want to give away information that Izuku could use to work through his questions. Good thing for Izuku that, if needed, he can have this conversation more than once.

“Okay,” he answers, reaching a hand up to slide under some of the gauze on his arm and scratch at an itchy spot underneath. “What do you want to ask me about?”

“First, I’m just going to ask some routine questions. I ask these of everyone I interview.” Tsukauchi writes something in his notebook, and Izuku can see that it’s just the date. “What’s your name?”

“Izuku Midoriya,” Izuku replies, watching Tsukauchi copy it down into the notebook. Between his handwriting being messy and the notebook being upside down, Izuku doesn’t think he’ll be able to read anything that isn’t his name when the detective makes notes later on, which sucks.

“What quirk do you have?” Tsukauchi asks, still writing. Izuku swallows.

“I’m registered quirkless, sir,” he says, which must be true enough for the detective’s quirk, because he just nods.

“You’re registered that way, but are you actually quirkless?” he smiles sympathetically when Izuku must make a face. “I know it’s a sensitive topic, but I have to ask.” Izuku nods, but he’s not offended about the question. He’s about to take a gamble.

“I am,” he says. “I’m quirkless.” He waits, praying that it’ll work, but Tsukauchi just nods and scribbles more on his paper. Izuku breathes a sigh of relief. *Even if I have a quirk, I’m still quirkless, legally and functionally. I was raised as a quirkless person. It’s a loophole for sure, but I am quirkless. I’m a quirkless person who just so happens to have a quirk. Not even having a quirk can change that part of me, can change the fact that I’m...* Izuku cuts off that line of thinking, because he can feel the way his chest seizes up when he thinks about it, when he considers his uselessness. Probably a bad idea to have a mental breakdown in front of a police detective.

“Okay,” Tsukauchi says. “Next, I’m going to ask you some questions regarding your knowledge of and possible ties to a couple of different groups. You may not have heard of all of them, and that’s okay. I also want to emphasize that if you are being coerced by any of these people, we can guarantee your safety, okay?” Izuku can feel Mirko’s gaze on him from the other side of the room.

“O-Okay,” Izuku replies.

“What is your relationship with the League of Villains?” Tsukauchi asks, pen moving across the paper already.

“They attacked us at USJ,” Izuku says. “Um. I don’t like them very much. I’m not working with them, if that’s what you’re asking.” He fidgets with the gauze on his right wrist, over where he’d cut himself and broken Fangirl’s quirk.

“That’s about what I expected,” Tsukauchi says with that same small smile. “Have you seen them since the attack on USJ?”

“No,” Izuku says. He hadn’t *seen* any of them. Heard them, sure. But he doesn’t remember having seen any of them, not even during that meeting he listened in on.

“Do you know what the term Gekkeiju refers to?” Tsukauchi asks, crossing one of his legs over the other. Izuku hums, thinking.

“It means a laurel tree, right?” Izuku watches Tsukauchi nod.

“It does,” he says. “Are you familiar with any other meaning of the word?”

“Yes,” Izuku says, because he is. Tsukauchi doesn’t seem surprised, but Izuku honestly can’t remember what exactly he’d let slip on the run through that became permanent, so he lets Tsukauchi ask him another question.

“What do you know about the group that calls themselves the Gekkeiju?” He asks, eyes on his notebook page and not Izuku’s face. Izuku glances over at Mirko, who’s watching him opening. She’s hard to read, for once.

“They’re some sort of villain group. Or criminal. I don’t know the details.” Izuku shrugs. “Fangirl is in the group.”

Tsukauchi nods. “That’s correct. Are you working with the Gekkeiju or any of its members?” He looks up at Izuku.

“No,” Izuku says. “I’m not. I’m not working with any villains or criminal organizations.” Tsukauchi nods, and Izuku wonders if he’s imagining the way he relaxes slightly.

“Are you leaking information about UA, UA’s students or faculty, or pro heroes in general to the Gekkeiju, the League of Villains, Stain, or any of their allies?”

“No,” Izuku replies, voice firm. It’s easy to answer the ones like this. Izuku isn’t a traitor.

“Good,” Tsukauchi says, flipping to the next page in his notebook. “At this point I’m fairly confident that you aren’t doing anything illegal, so the next couple of questions will be to clarify why you had some of what was considered classified information regarding what happened yesterday. Are you okay to keep going?” His eyes flick up at the IV bag. “We can take a break if you’d like.”

“I want to get it over with,” Izuku says, using Tsukauchi’s words from earlier. The detective nods, seemingly pleased.

“I think that’s for the best,” he says, smiling. “First off, I’m going to ask you if you said certain things. It’s okay if you did, you’re not necessarily in trouble. If you don’t remember, that’s okay, too. You’ve had a rough day.” Mirko snorts from where she’s still leaning on the wall, but she doesn’t say anything.

“Okay,” Izuku says, nodding. Tsukauchi nods in return.

“Did you know there was an attack underway prior to the Noumu impacting the train?” Tsukauchi is writing, again.

“Yeah,” Izuku says. “That’s why Mirko and I went to Hosu in the first place.” Tsukauchi glances up at him.

“I mean, did you know that the attack was underway *right then* , before the Noumu crashed into the train?” His face is unreadable. Izuku thinks he probably got training to be so good at that.

“I didn’t know until I knew the Noumu was going to crash into the train,” Izuku says, because he didn’t. Tsukauchi doesn’t need to know it crashed into the train three times for Izuku. Tsukauchi’s brows furrow slightly, and he writes something down.

“Okay. Did you know Iida was being attacked and by who prior to arriving at the scene?” Tsukauchi glances up at Izuku, picking his notebook up and leaning it against his knee, where his legs are crossed.

“I did,” Izuku confirms. He starts to fidget with the tape that holds the IV still where it goes into his arm, then thinks better of it.

“Did you know the villains Stain and Fangirl’s quirks prior to encountering them in battle?” Tsukauchi asks. Izuku resists the urge to grimace, because he *didn’t* know until he’d fought them the first two times, but Tsukauchi obviously knows he’d told Mirko and Todoroki before then.

“I knew when I called Todoroki,” Izuku answers, hoping Tsukauchi doesn’t call him out on the loophole.

Tsukauchi nods. “Did you know Todoroki was in the area when you called him?” Izuku nods, and the detective smiles slightly. “Verbal response, please.”

“R-Right,” Izuku says. “I did.”

Tsukauchi sighs, setting his pen down and looking up at Izuku. “You understand why we’re concerned now,” he says, his face looking apologetic. “You have not only classified information, but information that should be impossible for you to have obtained.”

Izuku swallows. “Right,” he says, voice barely a murmur. *It’s clearly not impossible*, he thinks, sullenly.

“First, let’s start with the classified stuff.” Tsukauchi picks up his pen again. “How did you learn that Hosu City was being attacked?”

Izuku blinks. “That was classified? Mirko told me when we left for the train,” he says, and Tsukauchi nods.

“That part isn’t classified. How did you know that Stain and Fangirl were at the scene?” Tsukauchi holds his pen over the paper, watching Izuku.

“I overheard it,” Izuku answers, and he really, really hopes this works out well, because he doesn’t want to try to kill himself in a hospital, of all places.

“Who did you overhear?” Tsukauchi asks, and this is the kicker. Izuku knows he’s asking about who he heard say that Manami and Stain would be there, which would have been Leadfoot and the League, but Izuku doesn’t want to say that. Izuku did, however, *technically* overhear someone else that night.

"I heard Eraserhead and someone else," he says, and it's true, even though it isn't actually the answer to Tsukauchi's question. Tsukauchi blinks, then starts scribbling down words faster. Izuku wonders if the ink is smearing.

"Who was Eraserhead talking to?" Tsukauchi asks. Izuku swallows.

"He was about my age," Izuku says. "Wearing red and black. His hair was pulled back, black as well. He looked like he might be an underground hero."

Tsukauchi nods. "Okay. I'll need to verify that with Aizawa, but you haven't lied to me thus far." He gives Izuku a slight smile. "Let's talk about some of the things that confuse me. How did you know that the two villains were at that specific location?"

"The boy who spoke with Eraserhead knew," Izuku answers. Tsukauchi hums in acknowledgement, writing.

"How did you know Todoroki was in the area?" Tsukauchi glances up at him, briefly.

"He'd responded to a text of mine," Izuku says, and it's true because in the second time through, Todoroki *had* responded by showing up to fight Stain and Fangirl.

"Okay," Tsukauchi's pen is kind of loud, now that Izuku thinks about it. "How did you know the quirks of the two villains?"

Izuku shrugs. "Lucky guess?" he responds, and Mirko snorts. When he glances over at her, she's rolling her eyes.

"Yeah, right," she says. Tsukauchi sighs.

"He's telling the truth, actually," Tsukauchi says, and Mirko raises an eyebrow.

"It was!" Izuku says, smiling sheepishly at her. He had guessed, technically. The villains didn't explain their quirks. He'd had to guess at the details, based on the information he had from the other two fights. It's still a guess, though. Technically.

"One hell of a fucking guess," Mirko grumbles, folding her arms over her chest. Izuku looks back to Tsukauchi.

"Midoriya, I have to ask. Do you have a quirk?" Tsukauchi looks up at him. Izuku frowns.

"I already answered that question," he says. Tsukauchi doesn't blink.

"You already said you're quirkless," he says. "But I want to confirm a theory of mine. Do you have a quirk?"

"Probably," Izuku says. "Most quirkless people without the extra toe joint do, it's just not something that ever becomes noticeable." Tsukauchi nods, unfazed.

"Do you have a quirk that's become noticeable, Midoriya?" He's staring Izuku down, pen pressed to the paper. Izuku meets his eyes.

"No, I don't," he answers, voice steady. It's *not* noticeable, not in the sense of it being *able* to be *noticed*. Anytime someone would notice, he has the choice to undo it, to reset to before they do. Izuku is telling the truth. He thinks.

Tsukauchi blinks. "Right," he says, biting his lip. "In that case, I'm sorry to pester you about it. It's

probably not a topic you like talking about,” he says, and Izuku just shrugs.

“There’s worse ones,” he says, which is true enough. Tsukauchi nods, writes something down.

“I have two last questions, and then we’re done with the official interview part of this,” Tsukauchi smiles at him. “Are you in danger?”

Izuku blinks. “I don’t think so,” he says. He can’t die, so danger isn’t really... it doesn’t apply to him.

Tsukauchi nods. “Okay. Is there anything you’re hiding from me?” Izuku squints at him.

“With all due respect, I’m fifteen, sir.” He hears Mirko laugh out loud at his words. “I’m hiding lots of stuff, but I’m not working with villains and I’m not doing anything that will hurt anyone else.” The opposite, in fact, but Tsukauchi doesn’t need to know that.

Tsukauchi laughs lightly, shaking his head. “Fair enough.” He glances up at Izuku, smiling. “That’s it for the official stuff, like I said. I do have a couple of questions, just some stuff that Mirko and I are concerned about.” Izuku blinks, glancing over to Mirko. He watches her face drop into a worried frown.

“At the end of the battle, you turned a knife on yourself,” Tsukauchi says, and Izuku turns back to look at him. “Can you explain that to me?”

“I-I wasn’t trying to hurt myself,” Izuku says, shaking his head. “I just wanted to break out of Fangirl’s quirk.” Tsukauchi’s face twitches, his pen freezing over the paper.

“Midoriya,” he says slowly. “That’s the first lie you’ve told this whole time.” Izuku freezes, staring at him. He can feel Mirko’s gaze burning a hole in his back.

“I--” Izuku swallows. “Her quirk, it amplifies emotions,” he takes a breath, shaky, “I wouldn’t have done that if I wasn’t under the effects of it, I-I swear.” He wouldn’t have, not where people could *see*.

Tsukauchi nods. “That’s true,” he says, glancing up to where Mirko is, then back at Izuku. “Do you ever hurt yourself or want to hurt yourself, outside of being under the effects of Fangirl’s quirk?”

Izuku bites his lip. “I’m training to be a hero,” he says, aware that he’s shaking, slightly. “Getting hurt is kind of in the job description.” He can feel the cuts on his arms, under the bandages. The ones he’d inflicted on himself.

“That’s not what I’m asking,” Tsukauchi says, voice gentle. “Do you intentionally inflict harm on yourself or desire to do so?” Izuku stares into his eyes.

“I-I’ve thought about it,” he says, voice breaking. He watches Tsukauchi sigh, reaching out a hand to rest on Izuku’s knee, the motion slow and gentle. Izuku hopes the man doesn’t ask if he’s acted on those thoughts. He hopes the man doesn’t ask if Izuku plans to act on them soon.

“Midoriya,” he says, quietly. “I’m sorry that you are going through this, and I appreciate you being honest with me.” He pulls away from Izuku, leaning back. “I don’t have the authority to do much, in this case,” he says, his eyes moving to where Mirko is standing. “I trust that Mirko will handle this appropriately, but...” he reaches into his suit pocket, pulling out a white card. “If you ever want to talk to someone, I would be happy to listen,” he says, passing Izuku his business card. Izuku stares at it.

“Are you going to tell Aizawa-sensei?” He asks, not looking at Mirko. His vision is getting blurry with tears that form without his permission.

“Yeah, kid,” Mirko says, and Izuku can hear her footsteps as she walks over to crouch beside him. “You’re not gonna get in trouble though, okay? We just want to make sure you’re alright.” He glances over to her, and he’s surprised to see that her red eyes are slightly watery, too. She puts a hand on his shoulder, giving him a faint smile.

“Okay,” Izuku whispers, even though it doesn’t feel okay. “When are you going to tell him?”

“When I deliver the internship reports,” she answers, squeezing his shoulder. “You did good, by the way. I don’t think many UA students take down world class criminals on their first internship.”

“Sensei is going to be really mad at me,” Izuku mumbles, hating the way his chest is tight and his eyes burn.

“He won’t be,” Mirko says, then glances to the side, at Tsukauchi. “If he’s mad, it won’t be at you. Right, Tsukauchi?” Izuku turns to see Tsukauchi nod.

“She’s telling the truth,” he says, giving Izuku a warm smile. “You’ll be okay, kid.”

Izuku nods, even though he doesn't really believe them.

--

When Izuku returns to the shared hospital room, tugging his IV stand with him, he’s surprised to walk in and find his friends looking at him, dark expressions on their faces. Izuku swallows, his throat still thick and wet from crying. Mirko taps him gently on the shoulder.

“Are you gonna be alright if I go?” she asks softly, quiet enough that Todoroki and Iida probably can’t hear. Izuku nods.

“I’ll be okay,” he answers, and steps into the room as Mirko pulls back. He hears the door shutting behind her as he walks in, shuffling over to his hospital bed.

“What happened?” He asks, looking up at his friends. Iida shifts, one hand reaching up to grab his shoulder.

“Iida just got his medical report,” Todoroki says. Izuku blinks, glancing between them.

“There may be permanent damage to my left arm,” Iida says, resting his hand over the cast. “They can’t know for sure until the cast is off, but they suspect my mobility will be limited and that the strength in my arm won’t fully return.” He clenches his jaw, and Izuku can see the way the muscles in his temples swell with the motion.

“I’m so sorry, Iida,” Izuku breathes, and he feels guilty, so guilty, for not resetting again, for not going back until none of his friends were injured. *Nobody should be injured except for me* .

“It’s alright,” Iida says, looking up at him and smiling slightly. “It’s... entirely my own fault. It happened because I strayed from the path of a hero.” He sighs, looking down at the floor. “I’m going to live with it, as a reminder to stay true to myself.”

“Iida...” Izuku says, too choked up to say anything else. He watches Todoroki look over at him, watches Iida take a few deep breaths before seeming to collect himself.

“What about you, Midoriya?” Todoroki asks, shifting to lean towards him. “How did your meeting with the detective go?”

“Uh,” Izuku squeaks. “Not great,” he says, voice cracking slightly. “Could have been worse.” Todoroki tips his head to the side slightly.

“Did they find out that you can see the future?” he asks, voice completely deadpan. Izuku blinks.

“W-What?!” He laughs, a nervous chuckle that bubbles out of his chest. “No, Todoroki, t-that’s not it.” He feels heat rising on his face.

“So it’s something, then,” Todoroki replies.

“What?” Izuku shakes his head. “No, there’s nothing!”

“You said ‘that’s not it,’ so it’s something else, right?” Todoroki nods thoughtfully. “You can deny it all you want, but I know you can see the future. Iida didn’t text you, so you didn’t get the information from him.”

Izuku blinks. “Y-You remember that...?” Todoroki blinks.

“Of course,” a slight smile crawls up Todoroki’s lips. “I wouldn’t forget it.”

Izuku laughs nervously. “Of course,” he repeats. He glances over at Iida, and when he sees the amused smile on his friend’s face, he thinks it might be okay that Todoroki suspects him.

--

When classes start up again after the internship, Izuku isn’t sure what he expects to happen. He doesn’t know exactly what Mirko told Aizawa, but judging by the way Aizawa immediately stares at Izuku upon walking into homeroom, it’s probably not great.

“Midoriya,” Aizawa says, voice not betraying any emotion. “Stay back after class. I want to talk with you about something.” He watches Izuku as Izuku gives a hesitant nod, turning to the board and writing something about the conclusion of the internships. Izuku can’t really listen, though, because his hands are shaking and his heart is beating too fast for him to pay attention. He wishes Mirko had given him more detail, but when he’d texted her and asked, she’d just reassured him that he wouldn’t get in trouble.

It was a nice sentiment, sure, but Izuku doesn’t think Mirko knows him all that well. Aizawa isn’t forgiving of things like this. Izuku’s heard Aizawa say it himself, and even if he hadn’t, he’s heard it on the grapevine from upperclassmen. If there’s one thing Aizawa doesn’t tolerate, it’s self sacrifice and risky behavior. Izuku is pretty sure that the police and the number seven hero finding out he’s thought about hurting himself more than counts.

So, Izuku gets through the homeroom period by doodling like Tsukauchis and Mirkos in his notebook. They’re not *great* sketches, per say, but they distract him enough that he doesn’t think he’s going to have a panic attack, so that’s good enough. Izuku knows that Todoroki notices what he’s doing, but Izuku ignores his friend’s obvious staring. He’ll talk to him after he’s done freaking out about the Aizawa thing. If he doesn’t get expelled, that is.

It’s over too quickly, though, and Izuku doesn’t fully register the ringing of the bell until his friends are all standing up, slinging backpacks over their shoulders and walking out of the room. Izuku swallows nervously, packing up his own notes. His fingers feel like they belong to someone else as he slides his notebook into his backpack. Uraraka gives him a sympathetic glance.

“See you later, Deku,” she says, waving and smiling. Izuku waves back, but his attempt at a smile comes out more as a grimace. She and Tsuyu walk out of the classroom together, leaving Izuku alone in the room with Aizawa. His teacher is standing behind his desk, but when Uraraka and Tsuyu are out of the doorway, he stands up and slides the door shut, sighing as he turns back to look at Izuku.

“Midoriya,” he says, walking over to where he’s sitting. “I’ll write you a pass for your next class, so don’t worry about being late.” He sits in the set next to Izuku’s and Izuku almost wants to laugh because that’s not what he’s worried about.

“O-Okay,” he says, voice shaky. Aizawa meets his gaze.

“I’m sure you already know what this is about,” he drawls. “I’m not going to beat around the bush. In her report about your internship, Mirko had almost exclusively praise for your performance,” he says, not breaking eye contact. Izuku feels like his eyes are frozen in place. “However, she expressed some concern about you as well.”

Izuku swallows. His throat feels tight, and he’s grateful when Aizawa keeps talking, because he knows he wouldn’t be able to say anything without crying right now.

“She informed me that you’d been training at night, even after a long day, and that you’d skipped breakfast.” He scratches at the scar under his eye, and Izuku wonders if he’s doing it subconsciously. “She also let me know that you’ve apparently considered hurting yourself in the past. Is that true?”

Izuku nods, his head bobbing up and down shakily. Aizawa doesn’t seem bothered, but he does sigh, low and slow.

“Midoriya. I need you to understand that taking care of yourself is *incredibly* important if you’re going to be a hero. This includes both physical aspects such as sleeping enough and eating enough, but it also includes mental health.” Izuku looks away from him, and Aizawa sighs. “Midoriya--”

“I-I’m sorry,” Izuku mumbles, voice damp. “It won’t happen again,” he says, squeezing his eyes shut to keep the tears from falling out. “Please don’t expel me.” Izuku waits, tensed in the chair like that, for a few moments. It feels like an eternity, but Izuku hears rustling of fabric and an exhale, closer to him than before. He feels Aizawa’s hand on his shoulder.

“I’m not expelling you,” Aizawa says. Izuku opens his eyes, sees his teacher crouching in front of him, face serious. “I’m going to ask you to take better care of yourself, but you are not in trouble. Do you understand?”

“I-I’m not in trouble,” Izuku repeats, inhaling sharply through his nose to suck up the snot that’s threatening to run out.

“You’re not in trouble,” Aizawa repeats, squeezing his shoulder. “Consider this part of your training. I want you to make an effort to sleep at *least* six hours every night. More if possible. And you need to eat three meals a day, even if you’re busy.” He pauses for a moment, and Izuku nods. “Also, I’d like you to consider talking to someone. It doesn’t have to be me, but any of the teachers here would be glad to, and Hound Dog is our guidance counselor. I can help arrange a meeting with him, or even Recovery Girl if you’re more comfortable with that.”

Izuku nods. “I-I’ll think about it,” he says, even though he has no intention of telling anybody about this. Nobody needs to know. Nobody will understand--it’s part of his quirk, probably. It’s part of his secret. Izuku can’t tell them about it. *They won’t get it. Not without the context. I’m not*

hurting myself; I'm just... training. Training for resets.

“Good,” Aizawa says. “You can talk to me at any time, about anything, as well. You won’t get in trouble for talking to me about your mental health,” he says, giving Izuku’s shoulder a squeeze as he stands up from the crouched position, pulling his hand off of Izuku and shoving it in his pocket. “Understood?”

Izuku nods, still shaky. “Understood,” he repeats back and Aizawa gives him the faintest hint of a smile.

“You can go to English, now,” Aizawa says, passing Izuku a piece of paper from his pocket. “Mic will let you in with this.” Izuku takes the piece of paper and nods, staring at it.

He feels kind of guilty as he walks out of the classroom, but he knows he doesn’t have a choice. He can’t let anyone know any more that they already do about the situation. *If people find out about this quirk , he thinks, I’ll be in danger. My friends will be in danger, too, because I won’t have the same element of surprise. Civilians will be in danger.*

Izuku can die as many times as it takes if it spares others from pain. He can dig his knife into his arm as many times as it takes for him to be okay. He can lie to as many people as it takes to keep this a secret. He’ll survive, after all.

Chapter End Notes

cw: hospitals, self harm mentions

i hope you enjoyed!!! sorry if it was lower quality than usual, and i look forward to reading the comments and stuff!!

discord: <https://discord.gg/Vqaj62ceCt>

training montage, part 1

Chapter Summary

last time: izuku gets interrogated!

Chapter Notes

hiiiiiii gamers!!!! i didn't know what to call this arc because it's not in canon so :) but anyway enjoy!

also a note! in future chapters, i will no longer be tagging for reference to self harm or for mentions of self harm wounds/injuries. i will still tag explicit self harm scenes. self harm will be referenced in most if not all future chapters, and wounds will also likely be mentioned.

(eye of the tiger starts playing)

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

It takes an entire week after they return to class for Aizawa to agree that Izuku is well enough to start training again. It's annoying, but Izuku thinks he understands why Aizawa is so insistent on it. The dark bruises on his neck have only just completely faded at his last session with Recovery Girl, and he's got a shiny scar where he was stabbed in the side. His ribs, somehow, don't show evidence of the damage at all, but Izuku supposes the scars from that are probably internal.

He's waiting for Aizawa at an outdoor sparring area, and it's a sunny day. It's almost the end of May, now, and it's warm enough that Izuku's uncomfortable in his long sleeved sports uniform, but he's not about to take it off. Even if his cuts are healed over right now, sealed up as a side effect of multiple healing sessions and his arms being bandaged all of the time anyway, there are still silvery white scars just barely visible above and below his elbows. With Aizawa on guard--and he is on guard--he's bound to notice.

Aizawa steps into the area wearing his usual heavy, black outfit, and Izuku can't help but wonder how on earth the man isn't miserable under all of those layers. His teacher looks the normal amount of tired as he walks up to Izuku.

"Midoriya," he says, greeting Izuku with a dip of the head. "How'd you sleep this weekend?" His gaze is searching as it looks over Izuku's face.

"I slept well," Izuku says, sighing. "And yes, it was at least six hours a night." Aizawa's been asking Izuku how he's slept and if he's eaten nearly every day since he came back from his internships, and frankly, it's starting to get on Izuku's nerves.

"Have you had lunch?" Aizawa asks next. Izuku resists the urge to roll his eyes, but it's very, very difficult.

“Yes. And breakfast. And some pocky during afternoon classes,” he replies, kicking his shoes at the grass under his feet. Aizawa grunts in acknowledgement.

“Good. Have you given any thought to what I said about talking to someone?” Aizawa asks. Izuku can feel his teacher’s eyes on him, but he looks at the ground, shrugging.

“I’ve thought about it,” he says, watching a particularly long blade of grass twitch in the wind.

“And?” Aizawa prompts. Izuku shrugs again.

“I don’t think it’s um. Necessary.” He nudges the piece of grass with his foot. It shifts easily. He hears Aizawa sigh.

“If I saw your arms right now, would I agree with you?” Aizawa counters, and Izuku looks up at him, startled. Aizawa stares at him with half lidded eyes. “I’m not stupid, you know. I’ve been teaching high school for eight years now.” His gaze drops to Izuku’s sleeves. “You’ve never taken off your school blazer or worn the short sleeved sports uniform, even when it’s warm out.”

“You’re wearing long sleeves, too,” Izuku says, tipping his head slightly to the side. “What about you, then?”

Aizawa stares down at him, face impassive. “We can both show our arms, if you want,” he drawls. Izuku raises an eyebrow at him.

“I fight people with quirks that make fire, acid, and electricity, along with literal nitroglycerin. Isn’t it ‘logical,’” Izuku makes air quotes as he speaks, “to wear more clothing? It’s more protection.” Aizawa raises an eyebrow, then shrugs.

“Fair enough. I’d still like you to speak to someone.” He slides his hands into his pockets. “I’m assuming you’ve at least considered *who* you’d want to speak with.”

Izuku frowns. “This... isn’t optional, is it?” It’s kind of a stupid question, but Izuku has to ask anyway.

“It’s not,” Aizawa confirms, nodding.

Izuku sighs, looking at his teacher’s neck instead of his face. “I’d, um, I’d like to talk to you, then. I guess.” He watches the way the fabric of Aizawa’s capture weapon shifts as his chest rises and falls with each breath. “Can we do it during training? It’s not like I have a lot of free time between classes, training with you, and training with All Might.”

“We can,” Aizawa confirms. “Your mental health should be higher on your priority list, though.”

Izuku gives him a half-smile. “Right,” he says, and when he looks up at Aizawa’s face again he can tell he isn’t buying it. “Well, what are we working on today? Training-wise, that is.” Aizawa gives him a searching look.

“We’ll work on stealth,” Aizawa says, after a moment. “And we’ll talk about why you think taking care of yourself is optional.”

Izuku grimaces. “Right,” he says. “We’re starting that today then, aren’t we.” It’s not a question, really, and Aizawa snorts, rolling his eyes.

“Yeah, problem child, we are. You’re going to track me through this forest,” he gestures to the wooded area to their left, “and every time I hear or see you, you’re going to have to answer a

question. Deal?"

"Do I have to answer truthfully?" Izuku responds, giving Aizawa his best shit eating grin. His teacher sighs, tipping his head back to look at the sky.

"He's trying to give me grey hair. It's on purpose, there's no other way," he murmurs, and Izuku can't help but snicker at it. Aizawa looks back at Izuku. "Yes, you have to answer truthfully. If you don't want to answer a question, tell me that, and I'll give you another one. I'd rather get no answer at all than an answer that isn't true."

"Interrogation round two," Izuku says, nodding. "Got it." Aizawa just stares at him.

"It's not going to be much of an interrogation if you remember what you were supposed to learn in heroics on Thursday," Aizawa drawls. "Keep quiet and out of sight and maybe I won't get to ask you anything at all."

--

The first time he catches Izuku, it's embarrassingly early. They've only been walking in the woods for about ten minutes when Izuku trips on a root that sticks out above the ground. The loose leaves covering the soil had concealed it, and Izuku catches himself before he falls, but not before he lets out a little gasp and Aizawa turns to stare directly at him.

"That was fast," Aizawa drawls, but he doesn't sound surprised in the slightest. "You need to watch where you're walking. In all environments, but especially in natural ones. There are more hazards than you're likely used to from training in artificial settings." Izuku nods, biting his lip.

"Um, I'll work on it!" he chirps, and Aizawa nods, sliding his hands into his pocket. "What's, um. What's your question?" He knows Aizawa remembers their deal; after all, it's only been a few minutes.

"Have you heard of square breathing?" Aizawa asks, and Izuku blinks. His teacher seems to take that as a no. "It's a breathing technique. It's useful for a number of things, like calming someone down when they're panicking." Izuku frowns.

"I'm not panicking," he says, and Aizawa nods, seemingly expecting that.

"Not right now. But what if you're caught in a quirk that makes you panic again?" Aizawa meets his gaze. "What if one of your friends is, and you're the one who calms them down? It's a useful skill for any hero. They teach it in the second year first aid course, but I think it's illogical to wait that long."

"What is it?" Izuku asks, seeing where this is going. "Are you about to show it to me?"

Aizawa nods. "It's simple. You breathe in for four seconds, hold for four, and breathe out for four. Then repeat." He demonstrates, his breath loud and exaggerated, probably so Izuku can hear. "If you're helping someone else, it's useful to do it along with them, so they can mimic your motions. Give it a shot."

Izuku narrows his eyes. "This isn't really a question," he says, and Aizawa arches an eyebrow at him.

"Would you rather I asked you an invasive question you didn't feel comfortable answering?" Izuku blinks, and Aizawa smirks ever so slightly. "I thought not. I'm not interested in using my position as your teacher to force you to disclose information you're not ready to share," he says, his face

turning serious. "I'd rather do something that's actually helpful. It's only logical."

Izuku blinks, then nods. "R-Right," he says. Aizawa tips his head slightly.

"Go ahead and demonstrate square breathing," he says. "Do it quietly first, like you would if you needed to use it subtly, then like you would if you were helping a civilian. Let's start with four cycles each way." Izuku nods, biting at his lip. A coil of anxiety that he hadn't realized was there unwinds, and he does as Aizawa says.

--

The rescue race goes by too fast. Izuku thinks that maybe, he should have tried harder. But it's over in an instant, and Izuku placed third in his group of five. He's sitting on a bench in the waiting area, now, and listening to his friends talk about it, talk about the bets they'd placed and how they're going to win their own races, is somehow worse than doing poorly in the first place.

"I was so sure that Iida would win," Uraraka says, sighing. "I should have known the ground being uneven would slow him down."

"I'm surprised Midoriya did so well," Ashido says, grinning and glancing over at Izuku. "No offense, man. I just don't think anyone knew you have those crazy parkour skills." Izuku shrugs, glancing over to where Todoroki is watching him.

"I only got third," he says, instead of really acknowledging what Ashido is saying. "I have a lot to work on."

"I'm gonna have to train with you, dude," Ashido says, shaking her head. "I can't believe I got last! I thought for sure that I'd been doing better." She groans, leaning back on the bench. Kaminari socks her in the arm, grinning.

"Yeah, those of us without quirks that let us move fast have got to stick together, right?" Kaminari looks up at Izuku and winks. "Sero and Bakugou aren't gonna be any help, that's for sure."

"I didn't get first because of my fucking race," Kacchan snarls from where he's leaning against the wall a little ways away. "I beat my opponents because I'm the fucking best." He glares at Izuku, for some reason, even as Kaminari starts whining, saying something about Kacchan basically being able to fly with his quirk. Izuku swallows. Kacchan looks away, growling and snapping at Kaminari, and somehow it's worse.

Izuku stands up from his place on the bench. "I'm going to go use the restroom," he says, voice flat. Uraraka nods at him, and Iida gives him a thumbs up, but nobody else seems to notice. Izuku turns and walks out of the gym waiting area robotically.

The thing is, Izuku is pretty sure if he reset now, he'd be able to try again. He'd be able to do the race over again, be able to do *better*, but he isn't sure he should. *Can I kill myself?* he wonders. *Do I have time? Will there be anyone in the bathroom to stop me?* He freezes in the hallway, pausing just a few paces from the door to the gym, because he hears footsteps behind him, quiet and rhythmic. He takes a deep breath.

"Midoriya?" Todoroki asks, and Izuku turns to look at him. His friend looks over his face. "Are you okay?"

"I-I'm okay," Izuku replies, clenching and unclenching his fists at his sides. "I'm okay." Todoroki hums in acknowledgement, walking closer to Izuku, close enough that Izuku can feel his body heat radiating off of his left side, can feel the cold coming from his right. Izuku wonders if he's always

that way, or if it's just from using his quirk during his group's race.

"You're shaking," Todoroki says, his eyes on Izuku's hands where they hang at his side. "Are you upset about placing third?" He meets Izuku's gaze with two mismatched eyes, and Izuku nods, hesitantly.

"Y-Yeah," he says, swallowing. "I just--I feel like I should have tried harder. Done better." Todoroki nods.

"I placed second in my race," he says, which Izuku already knows. "I feel similar to you about it." His lips twitch, like he's thinking about something. "Would you... nevermind, it's stupid," he says, looking away.

"It isn't," Izuku blurts out before he can stop himself. "What were you going to ask?" Todoroki looks back up at him, blinking.

"I've read that friends... hug each other. When one of them is sad," he says, and the way he implies that he's not used to having friends, the way that he looks at Izuku with open trust in his eyes makes Izuku feel a pang of something in his chest. Izuku smiles softly at him.

"I'd like that," he says, biting his lip. "If you're okay with it, that is."

"I wouldn't have brought it up if I wasn't," Todoroki answers, and he's reaching forward, pulling Izuku into a tentative hug. It's awkward and neither of them seem to know what to do with their hands, but Izuku feels better for it.

--

Aizawa is teaching Izuku to throw knives, next time they meet, asking Izuku a 'question' for every knife he throws that hits the board with anything but the blade. It's lenient, really, because if he'd chosen to have it be every time the knife doesn't stick into the board, Izuku would have asked a question for every knife he's thrown. The one he just threw hit the board directly on the bottom of the hilt, smacking into the board hard enough that if Izuku had gotten the spins right, it would have surely stabbed into the board itself. Izuku hisses a breath of frustration, turning to his teacher with a sigh.

"You gave it too much spin," Aizawa says, a hint of amusement in his voice. Izuku sighs, dramatically as he can.

"Yeah, I know," he says, picking up another throwing knife from the basket of them, sliding off the safety sheath. He doesn't throw it, though. After having answered so many of Aizawa's questions, he knows his teacher hasn't forgotten about them.

"Do you think having a mental illness makes a person weak?" Aizawa asks, and when Izuku glances at him, he's got his arms folded over his chest. "Answer honestly," he reminds Izuku with a look. "Don't just tell me what I want to hear."

Izuku knows it's a loaded question. "I don't know about *weak*," he says, looking to the side. "But it's not really... it doesn't make a person weak, but it makes them weaker than they would be, otherwise." Izuku doesn't look up at Aizawa, hears him grunt in acknowledgement.

"Do you think pro heroes don't struggle with their mental health?" he drawls, and Izuku swallows.

"That's two questions," he points out, glancing up to see Aizawa blink at him, slowly.

“The second one was rhetorical,” he says. “Mental illness isn’t a weakness in the heroics industry. It’s an inevitability.” He takes a breath. “All pro heroes will deal with the effects of trauma and of working in a career where lives are at stake. It’s part of the nature of the job,” he says.

“Having a high stress job doesn’t mean you’re going to go crazy,” Izuku says back at him, and Aizawa arches a brow.

“Mental illness isn’t ‘going crazy,’ problem child.” He narrows his eyes. “Do you think I’m crazy?” Izuku blinks.

“W-What?” he asks, and Aizawa nods slowly, patiently.

“Do you think Present Mic is crazy? Midnight?” He doesn’t wait for Izuku to answer. “What about you? Do you think you’re crazy? Or weak?” Izuku stares back at him.

“T-The deal is one question,” Izuku murmurs. Aizawa nods, turning back to look at the board.

“It is,” he confirms. “Go ahead, then.” Izuku swallows, turning to the board and throwing the knife in his hand. The side of it thumps into the board. It’s worse than his earlier attempts, and he knows Aizawa can tell it’s because Izuku’s hands are shaking.

“I’ll ask this, then,” Aizawa says, his eyes tracking Izuku’s movements as Izuku gets the next knife ready. “What makes me different from you, if we both struggle with mental health, but you think you’re weak and I’m not?”

Izuku frowns. “I’m not mentally ill,” he says, and Aizawa doesn’t react. He just watches him. “Um. It’s d-different,” he says, weakly.

“Okay,” Aizawa replies. “Why is it different?”

Izuku shrugs, wrapping the arm that isn’t wielding a knife around his ribs, like he’s hugging himself. “Y-You’re managing it better,” he mumbles. “It’s not getting in your way.” Aizawa nods.

“Do you know how I stop it from impacting me?” Aizawa asks, tipping his head slightly. “I talk to people who I trust, *before* it gets bad. I take care of myself. I take it seriously, instead of ignoring it.” Izuku stares back at him for a few seconds. Aizawa doesn’t blink.

“R-Right,” Izuku says, turning to throw the next knife.

--

Izuku isn’t surprised, exactly, when Aizawa confronts him on patrol. He’s been wondering for the past two weeks when it would happen, and he’s more surprised that it’s taken this long. It’s warm, even for the beginning of June, and Izuku’s usually red hoodie is unzipped and the sleeves rolled up, showing the black long-sleeved undershirt he wears underneath. He’s crouched on a low rooftop when Eraserhead appears, walking up to the front of the building from the street and tipping his head back to look up at Izuku.

“Ace,” he greets, his goggles glinting gold in the moonlight. “I’ve been looking for you.” Izuku dangles his legs off of the edge of the roof, swinging them as he looks down. It’s only a one-story, so he could probably jump down without an issue, but he’s not sure that he should give up his height advantage.

“I know,” he says, kicking his heels back against the brick of the building. “Lovely weather we’re having. I’m thinking about getting a summer costume, soon. Do you think they make tank tops

with hoods?" The nice thing about the mask is that it's easier to put on a careless air, easier to play unconcerned, since Aizawa can't exactly see his entire face. Izuku does his best to try and look confident, anyway, even though he's nervous that this is where his cover is blown.

"I don't want to make small talk with you," Aizawa says, irritation audible in his voice. "I want you to tell me why the police are asking me about you."

"Probably because you have a mysterious informant who's giving you information about notorious criminal organizations?" Izuku replies. The way Aizawa is phrasing it makes Izuku wonder if he doesn't know that Izuku "overheard" him and Ace talking. *That'd certainly be helpful*, he thinks.

"They're not asking about my informant," Aizawa says. "They're asking about who I met with the night before the Hosu incident. Where I met with him. If I noticed anybody else listening in."

"Oh," Izuku replies. Aizawa snorts.

"Yeah, *oh*," he says, and Izuku is reminded of the time he ate lunch on the roof and Aizawa thought he was going to jump off. It's a stark difference to now, when Izuku is on a roof only about fifteen feet above Aizawa, and his teacher looks ready to attack him if needed. Izuku hums, putting a hand to his chin like he's thinking.

"I don't think I saw anybody that night," he murmurs, tipping his head slightly to the side. "Do you?"

"No," Aizawa says. "Which is interesting, because if I recall correctly, there really wasn't anywhere for someone to hide."

"There's always somewhere to hide," Izuku replies, shrugging. Aizawa grunts.

"I'm only going to tell you this once," Aizawa says, his voice low and dark. "Stay *away* from my students. Don't get them involved. Don't put them in danger. If you cause one of them to come to harm's way, I *will* take you out."

Izuku smiles under his mask. "Oh, I know," he replies easily.

"What's your name?" Aizawa asks. Izuku arches an eyebrow at him, making the gesture as obvious as possible.

"It's Ace," he says. "You literally called me that a few minutes ago."

"Your real name," Aizawa replies. "What is it?"

Izuku hums, kicking his legs against the brick again. The soft thumps echo out onto the street. "Do you think you'd recognize it if I told you?" he asks, voice quiet.

"Maybe," Aizawa replies. Izuku tips his head back, looking up at the sky. The stars twinkle brightly in the navy blue, the sky empty of clouds.

"You first," he says, not looking down at Aizawa. "I don't know your civilian name, either," he says. It's a lie, of course. But it's what Izuku would say if he *didn't* know Aizawa's name, and as far as Aizawa knows, Ace doesn't.

"I'm surprised your quirk hasn't given you that," Aizawa responds, and Izuku glances down to see the man staring at him thoughtfully. Izuku shrugs.

“It only works when I’m in danger,” he says. “And you’re not really dangerous. Not to me, anyway.”

Aizawa grunts. “Right,” he says. “I will be, if you’re not careful.” It sounds like less of a threat and more of a warning. Izuku sighs.

“I’m aware,” he says. “Anything else?”

Aizawa shakes his head, sighing. “You haven’t actually answered any of my questions,” he replies.

“That’s intentional,” Izuku chirps in response. He thinks he’s getting kind of good at this whole vigilante thing. There’s something to be said for practice.

“Stop investigating the League,” Aizawa says. “And stay away from the Gekkeiju.”

“I won’t,” Izuku replies, and Aizawa sighs, deep and long suffering. Izuku watches him as he walks away, and even though Izuku knows it won’t be long before he puts two and two together, he hopes it at least takes long enough that Izuku gets some more information about the villains. Izuku doesn’t know what he’d do if people got hurt because he was found out too early.

--

The first time Shinsou comes to training with him, it’s a sunny Thursday afternoon. Heroics had been shorter than normal, and even though Aizawa had asked if Izuku would be okay with training with Shinsou, it still sets his nerves on fire to be in the gym with him, fifteen minutes before Aizawa told them to meet.

Izuku thinks it would be fine if Shinsou was talking. As it is, they’re both just standing on the gym mats, wearing matching sports uniforms, both with long sleeves. Izuku had said hello to Shinsou when he came in, just a few minutes after Izuku did, but Shinsou had just nodded and pulled out his phone. Izuku shifts his feet on the mat, moving back and forth nervously. He glances at Shinsou, who doesn’t seem to be paying him attention. Izuku looks at the floor, then back up at Shinsou.

“Um, how have your classes been?” Izuku asks, grateful that he doesn’t stutter. He watches Shinsou glance at him, his phone still held in front of him.

“They’re fine,” Shinsou replies, looking back at his phone. Izuku swallows.

“T-That’s great!” Izuku says, laughing nervously. “Do you like training with Aizawa-sensei?”

Shinsou shrugs. He doesn’t look over to Izuku. “I guess.” Izuku gets the message pretty clearly, and he shuts up, looking at the mat on the floor of the gym. He thinks about the sports festival. About what Shinsou had said to him. It’s not exactly a surprise that the guy doesn’t like Izuku, but some small part of Izuku had hoped that all of that stuff had just been to get him to respond, to get him under Shinsou’s quirk. *I guess not.*

Izuku looks up when he hears the door to the gym open. Aizawa walks in, nodding to Izuku and Shinsou as he steps inside, one hand in his pocket and the other at his side. His long sleeves are rolled up to his elbows, and Izuku finds his eyes catching on the pale, exposed skin there. He can’t see any scars, but he didn’t exactly expect to see any. He’s a little jealous that he can’t roll up his own sleeves, and maybe if he still just had silvery scars he’d roll them up a little, but with the fresh cuts just above his elbow, stinging and rubbed raw under his uniform, he knows better than to risk it.

“Take your shoes off and put your phones on the bench,” Aizawa says, sliding his own shoes off

without looking at them. “You’re sparring.” He lifts his capture weapon off from around his neck, draping it over the bench. Izuku nods, walking over to the bench and toeing his shoes off. He hears Shinsou sigh from behind him.

“Is there a problem?” Aizawa asks, looking over Izuku’s head at Shinsou. Izuku takes a step to the side so he isn’t between them, looking back and forth as Shinsou glares at Aizawa.

“I’ve already found him, and lost,” Shinsou huffs, folding his arms over his chest. “Do you want to watch me get my ass beat?” Aizawa arches an eyebrow.

“Did I say you’d be fighting against him?” Aizawa asks, stepping toward Shinsou. Izuku swallows, inching out of their way and carefully setting his phone on the bench. He can feel the tension in the room like a thick syrup, and he’s not a fan of it. He pulls off his socks, setting them in his shoes, and straightens back up to watch.

“You’ll be teaming up to fight against me,” Aizawa says, eyes darting to the side to make sure Izuku is listening. “No quirks, no weapons,” he says, cracking his neck and walking toward the center of the mats. “And no biting.”

“No biting?” Shinsou says, his brows furrowing. He looks over at Izuku. “Do you really bite people so often he has to *say* that?” Izuku feels his face flush red, and he looks down at the ground.

“I, um--Kind of? I don’t really, i-it’s more of a--” Izuku stutters out, but Shinsou cuts him off, rolling his eyes.

“Forget it. I don’t actually want to know.” He stalks past Izuku, into the center of the gym, where Aizawa is standing, hands on his hips waiting for them. Izuku bites his lip and follows, stopping a few feet away from Aizawa and getting into a fighting stance. Shinsou glances over at him, copying the motion. Aizawa nods.

“Ready?” he asks, stepping back and bending his knees slightly, fists raised. Izuku nods, and out of the corner of his eye, he sees Shinsou doing the same.

Izuku’s sparred against Aizawa enough that he knows that the way his teacher dips slightly before moving forward means that he’s starting off with a kick aimed at about stomach height. Izuku deflects it easily, moving to the outside of Aizawa’s leg and darting in, throwing a punch that Aizawa dodges away from without even blinking. Izuku sees Aizawa’s next move before he throws it, too, a punch towards Shinsou’s shoulder that Aizawa telegraphs obviously. It’s how Aizawa had sparred with him when he first started, and Izuku realizes now how much Aizawa had been upping the difficulty on their fights since then.

Shinsou doesn’t have that experience, though. He tries to dodge out of the way of the punch by sliding back, but the motion is too slow and too late, and Aizawa’s punch taps him lightly on the shoulder. Shinsou frowns, raising his own knee up for a kick, but he drops his arms when he does, and Izuku winces as Aizawa uses the opening to elbow Shinsou in the chest. Shinsou falls back, landing on his ass.

“Fuck,” he swears, and Izuku grimaces, glancing over at Aizawa, who steps back and gives him a nod.

“Tell him what he did wrong,” Aizawa says to Izuku, and Izuku nods, swallowing. He takes a step toward Shinsou and offers a hand.

“You, um, d-dropped your hands,” he says, feeling his voice grow higher as Shinsou glares at him

from the ground, not taking his hand. “When you kicked, I-I mean.”

Shinsou gets up on his own, swatting Izuku’s hand out of the way. “Yeah, I noticed that when he hit me,” he growls, and instinctively, Izuku dodges away from his hand as he waves Izuku off. Izuku hates the way he flinches back, the way he expects there to be an explosion from Shinsou’s palm, but he can’t stop himself. He knows Shinsou and Aizawa notice, too, because they’re both staring at him.

“Get ready,” Aizawa says, not acknowledging Izuku and Shinsou’s interaction. Izuku obeys the order, getting back into a fighting stance. Next to him, Shinsou does the same, a scowl on his face.

Aizawa opens with a sweep this time, aimed at Shinsou’s legs. Shinsou steps out of the way, just barely, and Aizawa uses the momentum from his sweep to pivot and swing a leg out at Izuku’s ribs. Izuku blocks it, wincing when the foot hits his forearm instead of the arm guards he’s grown used to, but he steps in anyway, throwing an elbow strike that Aizawa blocks. Izuku steps back, then, trying to get out of Aizawa’s punching range, but he stumbles when Shinsou throws a kick from too close, his thigh hitting Izuku in the side. Aizawa blocked the kick easily, sweeping Izuku’s feet out from under him. Izuku falls backwards, directly into Shinsou, who catches him under the armpits, swearing.

“Get off of me,” he hisses, shoving Izuku away from him. Izuku stumbles away, landing on his feet and gritting his teeth, turning to look at Shinsou.

“You know, this would work better if we worked together,” he snaps and Shinsou snorts out a huff of laugh, rolling his eyes.

“Yeah, right,” he says. “I’m *dying* to team up with you.” Izuku blinks, opening his mouth to say something, but Shinsou’s moving at Aizawa again, throwing a kick that Aizawa dodges before Shinsou has even finished throwing it. Izuku sighs, ducking into the fight to block a kick that Aizawa throws at Shinsou’s head.

“What does that mean?” Izuku says, not looking at Shinsou as he slides in to lob a punch at Aizawa’s stomach. Aizawa deflects it, but only barely, and he gives Izuku a nod.

“It means,” Shinsou says, throwing a kick that Aizawa blocks with a forearm, “that last time we teamed up, I fought you immediately after.” He hisses in frustration as one of Aizawa’s kicks smacks against his cheek, and Izuku winces in sympathy. “It should be clear by now that I don’t intend on making friends.”

“It’s not like we have to be friends to work together,” Izuku replies, barely side stepping out of the way of a backhand aimed at his face. “Did you mean it?”

“Mean *what*?” Shinsou growls, stumbling back as Aizawa knocks him off balance with a shove.

“At the sports festival,” Izuku says, throwing a punch that he *knows* is too messy. “You said that I took advantage of you. Do you really think that’s why I teamed up with you?”

“Why else?” Shinsou asks, glaring at him. “You used me to get into the tournament and then got lucky enough to get paired with me first round. Pretty fucking convenient.” Izuku blinks, frowning.

“I didn’t pair up with you to take advantage of you,” he says, voice louder and higher than he wants it to be. “I paired up with you because I think your quirk is amazing!” He’s distracted, enough so that Aizawa hit him in the gut with a kick. Izuku hisses out a breath, sliding out of Aizawa’s range. He looks back to see Shinsou, staring at him with a startled look on his face, and

Aizawa throwing a kick at the other boy's stomach. Izuku grimaces, ducking forward to nudge Shinsou out of the way, blocking Aizawa's hit. Aizawa steps back, watching them.

"Do you actually mean that?" Shinsou asks, his face twisting strangely. "Or are you just trying to be nice?"

"I mean it," Izuku says, clenching his hands into tight fists. "So stop being an asshole, and help me fight Aizawa-sensei."

Shinsou nods, stepping back into a fight stance that mirrors Izuku's own. "Fine," he says, and they turn to face Aizawa, together.

Chapter End Notes

cw: self harm mentions and that's it i think

i hope u enjoyed!!! thank you for the comments and stuff, and thank u for being patient with me as i do weird shit like insert arcs between canon ones :')

discord: <https://discord.gg/Vqaj62ceCt>

training montage, part 2

Chapter Summary

last time: izuku trains with aizawa, opens up a little, trains with shinsou, argues a little.
it's fun all around

Chapter Notes

hi!!! i hope you're all doing well! i don't have classes fridays so today is my friday :3

i know i don't normally warn for this in beginning notes, but please be cautious about the suicide stuff in this chapter. i'll detail more in the end notes, but it's more than the usual stuff

enjoy!!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

The idea comes to Izuku when he's training with Mirio and All Might, when they're trying to get Mirio to increase his tolerance to his new quirk. Mirio's just thrown a punch, one that sends wind rushing forward from his fist, and he sighs, flexing his fingers.

"Y'know, I read up on quirk training again," he says, tossing his head to the side to look at where All Might and Izuku are watching. "It's different than my permeation for sure, but the basic concepts still apply." All Might nods, humming in agreement, but Izuku blinks.

"Like what?" he asks, and Mirio pauses, before a knowing look passes over his face.

"Oh, duh, I forgot that you never would have had quirk counseling." He gives Izuku a bright smile. "It's pretty simple. Quirks are kind of like muscles, so the more you push your limits with them, the bigger your limit gets." He looks down at his hand. "There's also the control aspect of it. The more you practice, the better you get at that. I had to worry about control with permeation more than the limits, but with my new quirk, I'm having issues with both." He flexes his fingers, and Izuku can see the way they're swollen and irritated. Any time the older boy used his quirk too much, he got sore and bruised, like he'd been punching a wall or something. Izuku doesn't envy him; at least with Izuku's quirk, he doesn't get negative effects on just a couple of uses.

"Have you named your new quirk yet?" Izuku asks, thinking out loud. "It's not from either of your parents, right? So you'd get to name it yourself."

Mirio blinks, then laughs. "I, um... I haven't thought about it!" He rubs the back of his neck, an almost nervous look on his face, and Izuku doesn't miss the way he glances at All Might. *All Might doesn't have a name for his quirk, either, at least not publicly*, Izuku thinks. *Maybe it's something he suggested to Mirio*.

Izuku nods. "I guess it doesn't really need a name to work," he says in response, and Mirio nods.

“Right!” He replies, flexing and unflexing his hands. “Oh, that reminds me. Have your teachers talked at all about the summer training?”

Izuku tips his head to the side. “Summer training?” he echoes, his brows furrowing slightly. Mirio laughs.

“I guess that answers my question!” he responds. “Usually there’s a lot of quirk training, so I was wondering what they’ll do with you while you’re there,” he says. “Maybe they’ll teach you some new weapons or something!”

Izuku blinks, nodding, but as Mirio turns back to the practice dummy to throw another quirk-powered punch, an idea is starting to form in Izuku’s head. He watches Mirio’s fist extend neatly, a little bubble of pressed air shooting off from it, whooshing forward to slap into the practice dummy’s face. *Quirk training, huh ?*

--

The way Izuku sees it, his quirk training should meet three criteria. It should push his limits, it should improve his control, and it should make good use of the time he gets from the resets. Izuku’s pretty sure that the first part will be easy--he just has to die a bunch, right? As long as he gets to the point where he’s slightly ill but not unable to function, it shouldn’t be an issue at school. The last part is simple, too. Izuku can study in the time between his reset point and when he kills himself, or he can gather information or *something* . He’ll get to have more time than anyone else, that’s for sure.

I have no idea how to improve my control, though. He’s sitting on the edge of his bathtub now, waiting for it to fill with warm water. The steam rolling off of it makes his face feel sticky and moist as he turns his knife over in his hands. There’s the obvious thing, which is getting better at killing himself quickly, but the issue with that is that it’s not *actually* controlling his *quirk* , is it? Izuku’s pretty sure at this point that he has to die to activate it, so it’s not like he’ll be able to control the activation, but he’s still not totally sure why he resets to when he does. *Maybe, with practice, I’ll be able to choose .*

Izuku wishes, not for the first time, that his journals kept the information he put in them between resets. If they did, he’d be able to take notes as he went, be able to record each reset method and each round of training perfectly and permanently, but as it is, he’s going to have to rely on his memory of things. As he takes off his clothes and slides into the warm bathwater, he’s strangely excited. If this goes as planned, he’ll get to try so many different ways to kill himself that he might find a way that works better than what he’s been doing thus far.

The bath is warm and soothing, but Izuku still feels his pulse pick up when he holds the sharp blade of his knife to the side of his neck, to the crook between his windpipe and the muscle that runs along the side. He can feel the knife shifting and bobbing with the force of his blood pumping through that artery, not far beneath the skin. Izuku takes a deep breath, and plunges the knife into his neck, digging as deep as he can.

He bleeds out in moments.

--

Izuku wakes up in his bedroom, sitting at his desk with his hands on the keyboard. He blinks, glancing to the time on his monitor. It’s 7:21 p.m., so about 10 minutes before he’d gone to run the bath to start his training. He feels fine. *First try, 7:21, nothing wrong*, he thinks to himself. *First try, 7:21, nothing wrong* . He tries to burn it into his mind, tries to remember the time. He needs to

know the detail of how his quirk works.

He's got a list, typed up on an unnamed file on his computer and hidden in the recycling bin. He clicks through, opening it up. If it gets deleted, it's not a big deal, and even though his mom shares this computer with him, it's in his room, after all. He'll have time to close the file if she wants to use it, and she won't check the recycling bin.

The notepad file is simple, just a list of methods he wants to try. The first one, *slit your throat*, is done. He doesn't bother removing it from the list. *It's not like it's going to stay different*. He looks down the list, reading the second item. *Electrocution*.

Izuku closes the list and stands up, stretching. He's read up on this one, and while he's certainly no electrician, he definitely knows more than he used to. He thinks he's got a good idea of how to pull this off, and it'll be extra easy tonight of all nights. He'd picked tonight to do this in the first place because his mom is out with Kacchan's mom, getting dinner at a little restaurant a few blocks south of Kacchan's house. She'd been so apologetic, telling Izuku she'd be gone until at least ten. Izuku had felt kind of bad convincing her it was fine, but it's not like he's going to try this with her in the house.

Izuku walks out of his bedroom, his socked feet making almost no noise on the floor of their home. Most of the lights are out, and the sun has started to set outside their windows, so the house is shrouded in dark shadows, filling the corners and the floor like grey water. Izuku shuffles into the kitchen, listening to the steady ticking of the clock that hangs above the stove, and he matches his steps to the sound. Izuku crouches down, opening the kitchen cabinet. He pulls out the toaster, a shiny silver thing with a coiled up cord nestled beside it, and he shuts the cabinet with a soft clink. Izuku lifts the toaster and walks back to the bathroom, listening as the beat of the clock slowly grows quieter. He sets the toaster on the bathroom counter and turns to the tub, turning on the faucet to the hottest it goes. He can't hear the clock ticking at all.

Izuku stares at the rising water, filling the tub with steaming liquid. The mist rising off of the surface quickly fills the air, and Izuku breathes it in, slowly, as he unwinds the cord of the toaster. The black plastic on the cord is cool and slightly sticky under his fingers, and it's easy enough to plug it in to the wall. He wonders if he should turn it on, or if it'll do the job turned off. He turns, shutting off the faucet. It's too quiet in the bathroom, now, the only sound a quiet dripping of water from the metal faucet, plinking into the bath. Izuku takes a deep breath before sliding off his clothes and pressing the button down on the toaster.

The bath is hot, hot enough that it stings when he slips into the water, but Izuku doesn't really care. He hisses at the heat as he lowers himself in so that his chest is completely submerged, reaching down with one hand to make sure he's turning the metal at the drain. He leans his head back until the bare skin on the back of his neck is pressed to the metal of the faucet. *I have to complete the circuit*, he thinks, even though he's not entirely sure the whole thing works. He hopes it's enough to kill him as he reaches with his other hand and hooks his fingers under the bottom of the toaster, tugging it off of the counter and into the bath.

It hits the water with a splash, and in a few seconds, Izuku feels the shock, a sensation like he's being shook up, like he's the carbonation in a soda someone had dropped on the ground. It hurts like getting burned, but it only lasts a couple of seconds before he just feels numb and hot, his vision blurring and then going black.

--

Izuku wakes up at his desk, blinking in surprise. He hadn't really noticed the dying part of that, hadn't even really realized he was going unconscious. He bites at his lower lip, glancing to the time

on his desktop. *Second try, 7:21, no symptoms* . He opens his file, even though he knows what's next on the list. *Hanging* .

Izuku closes the file and stands up from his desk. He's thought about this one, of course, spent long hours reading about it, erased his browser history plenty of times. He's even got a rope that he'd picked up after school a few days ago, stashed in his closet behind a box of old notes from his middle school classes. He goes to his closet and takes it out now, feeling the rough texture of it, the twists and spirals in the material. It's looped up, and the bundle of it is heavy in his hands.

Izuku can't say he's looking forward to this one, but he sits down on the edge of his bed anyway, the mattress compressing under his weight as he starts to tie the end of the rope. He takes about four feet of the rope and folds it, then wraps it around itself. He watches the knot form, just like he's seen in old American movies about criminals who rode on horses and killed with flintlock pistols. Izuku slips the end of the rope through the small loop and tightens it, testing the strength of his handiwork. It feels sturdy. Deadly.

Izuku walks back to his closet, where his clothes hang by a wooden rod set into the wall. This is where he's not sure if it'll work; what if it isn't high enough or strong enough to hold his weight? He ties the other end of the rope to the closet rod, setting the loop as high as he can get it. He has to stand on his tippy toes to get his head inside the loop, and he grits his teeth in preparation as he drops, picking his legs up so that they're no longer supporting his weight.

The noose tightens like a vice around his neck, and Izuku feels a pressure in his head like he's never known--a thick, heavy sensation. He sees lights flashing in his vision, hears a ringing in his ears, and in a few seconds, he's gone.

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Izuku opens his eyes. *7:21. Third try*. He takes a moment, thinks. He might have a headache, might be a little more tired than he was after the first few tries, but it's hard to tell. He thinks he can still hear the ringing in his ears, but when he concentrates, tries to see if he's imagining it, all he can hear is the soft whir of the computer fan and the crickets outside his window. *Third try, 7:21, tired*, is what he settles on.

This time, he spends an hour and half studying, just rereading the textbooks and his notes, looking up the things that confuse him and writing messy notes he knows will be gone when he wakes up next. He's not dreading the next method, exactly, but he's determined to use this time wisely. The hour and a half goes by far too quickly.

When Izuku goes to the kitchen and gets a black plastic garbage bag from under the sink, the same kind he'd used to clean up the beach this spring, tears come to his eyes without his permission. He cries, quietly in the empty kitchen as he tightens the bag around his neck, using the ties of the bag to seal in his air. He squeezes out the air that's already in the bag, the wetness of his tears sticking the plastic to his face. He sits down on the floor and waits.

Suffocation takes longer than hanging, and it feels worse. After a few moments, Izuku is still very much alive and conscious, but his head hurts and he feels like he's not getting enough air. He feels his heart rate start to pick up, faster and faster as a sense of desperate panic overtakes him. In his last waking moments, he claws at the bag where it's tied to his throat, his fingers to numb and weak to do anything more than scratch at the skin.

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Izuku wakes up gasping this time, his head pounding a steady rhythm to the beat of his heart. He

sucks in air, his eyes blurring with the tears that come to them as he glances to the clock. Even though he's not *trying* to change his reset point this time, it still hurts to see that it's the same. *Fourth try*, he thinks. 7:21. *My head hurts.*

He grabs his phone where it sits next to him on the desk, his breath coming in shaky sobs. *Just one more time*, he thinks. *One more tonight and then I'll take a break until tomorrow*. He opens his messaging app, even though he knows it's a bad idea, and he types out a message to Todoroki.

Hey, are you awake? He types, sending it before he can talk himself out of it. He draws his knees up to his chest, leaning his side into the desk chair and pressing his face into the fabric. He stares at his phone screen even though it's blurry, blinking every few seconds to clear the tears from his eyes. His head hurts.

Yes, comes the reply. *Is everything okay?* Izuku isn't surprised by that response, really. He doesn't text Todoroki often, and if he does, he's usually pretty bright and cheerful, sending emojis and lots of exclamation points. He takes a deep, shuddering breath, and types out a reply.

I'm okay!!! I have a headache, though. He hopes he isn't worrying Todoroki too much, but a selfish little part of him wants someone to worry about him, to comfort him. He doesn't have to open his file to know that the next method he has lined up is a painful one, a slow one.

I'm sorry, Todoroki replies. *Are you ill?* Izuku bites at his lip a little as he types out a reply.

Kind of, he sends, then, *I get headaches like this when I overwork myself. I've been training a lot lately*. It's close enough to the truth, and it's not like Todoroki is going to remember this, anyway. Izuku slowly uncurls himself from his position on the chair, standing and walking into the laundry room as he watches Todoroki's replies pop up on his screen.

Rest is important, Todoroki sends. *Are you resting right now, at least?* Izuku can't help but grimace a little at that as he pulls open the cabinet they keep all of their soaps and cleaning stuff in. He pulls a bottle of bath additive out, then a container of a cleaning chemical. He tugs out a thick plastic bin they use for soaking stained clothes in bleach water, setting it on the floor.

I'm still training, Izuku replies. *I'm almost done, though.* He puts both chemicals on the floor next to the bin and stands up, grabbing clothing from the nearest bin and stuffing the cloth against the gap at the bottom of the door and the air vents in the corner of the room. The laundry room is tiny as is, and with the vents plugged, it already feels stuffy and stale in the room.

If you're feeling ill, you should rest, Todoroki replies, quickly. Izuku thinks he must be watching the phone. *Why are you training right now? We had a full schedule at school today. That should be sufficient to improve your skills.* Izuku empties one of the bottles into the plastic container.

It's okay, Izuku replies. *I'm really almost done. You're a good friend, you know that, right?* He sits down on the floor, right in front of the little tub and unscrews the other bottle. This one smells sharp and acrid.

Thank you, Todoroki replies. Izuku starts pouring the second bottle into the mix. *Are you really okay? You're acting strangely.* The room starts to smell of rotten eggs.

I'm okay, Izuku texts, sending the message as his vision starts to swim. He sees a reply appear on screen, but as he draws his next breath, his vision blurs to nothingness.

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Izuku's first thought upon waking is that that wasn't nearly as painful as he'd thought it would be.

He wishes that he knew how long he was unconscious before he died, though, because if it was more than a few minutes, he'd be worried about the smell tipping someone off to what he's doing.

Izuku glances at the clock, the ache in his head still there, stronger and angrier. His stomach is rolling, too, and as he settles back into wakefulness, he feels a sharp sting in his belly and a nausea that has him covering his mouth with one hand, gagging into his palm as he throws himself out of his room and into the bathroom. He leans over the toilet, heaving into the bowl.

Fifth try, 7:21, headache and throwing up. This is my limit.

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Classes the next day are... difficult. Izuku remembers it taking about a week to fully recover after the sports festival, but he wasn't banking on heroics training hand to hand combat training. It should be a warm day, but the only part of Izuku that feels warm in the slightest is his face, which he'd noticed was flushed red when he got up this morning. He's pretty sure he's got a fever, too, but he hasn't checked and frankly doesn't really want to know. *I'll get through this, either way, and as soon as I think it'll be safe, I'll train more. It'll be worth the pain when I can reset more times without getting sick like this.*

"Midoriya!" All Might calls his name, startling him slightly. "You'll be sparring with young Bakugou." Izuku nods, turning his head to see where Kacchan is standing, his face set in a scowl. All Might keeps talking, announcing the other pairings, as Izuku walks over to his friend, biting at his lip. *It's been a while since we've sparred*, he thinks.

"Deku," Kacchan greets, cracking his knuckles. "I'm not going to go easy on you," he says, pivoting on his heels and walking towards one of the areas taped off for sparring. Izuku swallows, training behind him.

"I-I wouldn't expect you to," he replies, the foam mats bouncing slightly under his bare feet. "I don't think we're allowed to use quirks, though."

Kacchan huffs. "Yeah, I fucking heard." He stops at the edge of the square and turns to face Izuku, his eyes narrowed slightly. "What the fuck is wrong with your face, anyway? Did you get a sunburn or something stupid?"

"N-No!" Izuku says, shaking his head. "I, um, I-I don't know what you're talking about?" It comes out as more of a question, and Izuku watches as Kacchan slowly raises an eyebrow at him, lips drawing into a snarl.

"Fine then, don't tell me," he growls, getting into a fighting stance. "You know what to fucking do. Let's fight, Deku." Izuku swallows and nods, because he really *does* know what to do. Fighting with Kacchan is something he's been doing for a really, really long time. The difference between when they were kids and now is that Izuku fights back.

Izuku makes eye contact with Kacchan before starting, stepping forward with his back leg and spinning around to throw a neat kick at Kacchan's head. It's slow on purpose, mostly to signal the start of the fight, and Kacchan blocks it with a forearm, his bare skin making a slapping sound against the flesh of Izuku's ankle. Izuku lands, a little more unsteady than he would normally be. He can't help it, really; his head is swimming, and even though he's not nauseous, he feels like his limbs are weaker than they should be.

Kacchan twists his weight onto his front foot, lobbing a punch that glances past Izuku's cheek. The dodge sends sparks of light into the edges of Izuku's vision, and he can't help but frown, unable to

do anything more than bring up an arm to block the kick Kacchan throws at him next. His head is throbbing, more than before, and he wonders why exercise would be making it worse. He sees Kacchan's brows furrow, and when Kacchan throws a right hook at him, Izuku *knows* he's going slowly on purpose. Testing Izuku's reaction time.

Izuku blocks it with both hands, but they both know he's weaker than he should be. Kacchan is scowling, and Izuku steps away from him, his head buzzing with something that feels almost like TV static. He blinks once, then again, but the fuzzy edges to his vision won't fade. He gives his head a shake, but that makes it worse.

"Deku, what the fuck?" Kacchan asks, but his voice is lacking its usual heat. Izuku feels a warm hand grab him by the bicep, the heat of Kacchan's palm leaking through Izuku's sleeve.

"M okay," Izuku mutters, trying to swat Kacchan's hand off of him, but the grip only tightens. Kacchan hisses out a breath, tugging Izuku closer and resting the back of his hand on Izuku's forehead. His skin is cool and dry, and Izuku blinks at the contact, somehow surprised by it even though he'd seen it coming.

"Are you fucking *sick*?" Kacchan asks, a mixture of anger and alarm in his voice. "Why the fuck are you here if you're sick? You can barely stand, assbat." He drops his hand from Izuku's forehead, moving it to his other arm and tugging on him, half-shoving and half-guiding him to the ground. Izuku blinks dazedly up at him, his vision swimming as he looks up from his seat on the gym mat. He wonders, briefly, why Kacchan looks so worried.

"Not sick," he replies, shaking his head. *Bad idea*, he thinks vaguely. His vision is going dark, and he registers that his heart is beating too fast in his chest. He sets a hand over his heart, trying to see if he can feel it through his chest, but he can't even really hold his hand up to do that. His hand drops to his lap and he stares at it. He wonders why he's sitting on the floor of the gym.

"Hey, All Might!" Kacchan shouts, too loud. Izuku winces. "Something's really fuckign wrong with Deku!" Izuku looks up, blinking, and when he sees the entire class turning to look at them, he presses his palms to the foam mat and starts to push himself up.

"Stay down, idiot," Kacchan hisses as Izuku lurches to his feet unsteadily. Izuku sees Kacchan reaching out to steady him, but each time Izuku blinks, his vision fills more and more with a sort of buzzing blackness, and vaguely, he wonders if he's dying

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When Izuku comes to, it's slow and gentle, like tugging himself out of bed on a Sunday morning, the sheets still warm around him. That's how he knows he hasn't died, really. Resetting for him has always felt like coming up for air after swimming, like blinking water from his eyes and gasping while he takes in his surroundings. It's not unpleasant, but it's never nice like this, either.

He opens his eyes, his vision blurry for a second until it clears, showing him the familiar ceiling of UA's infirmary. Above him to his left, he can see an IV bag full of dark, crimson red blood, labelled with *O negative* in big text. He blinks at it for a moment, realizing that it's half empty, before he starts to pull himself into a sitting position. He feels something warm and heavy on his legs, and he looks down, his mouth opening slightly in surprise.

Draped on top of his blanket-covered legs and still wearing his sports uniform is Kacchan, his cheek pressed into the blue blanket and his face smooth and relaxed with sleep, turned to face Izuku. His arms are folded under his head, and as he breathes in and out, Izuku can see his brow twitching, like he's irritated in a dream. Izuku stares at his friend, blinking and wondering if he's

dreaming.

“Oh, good,” Recovery Girl’s voice startles Izuku, but he manages to suppress his instinct to jump. “You’re up.”

“W-What...?” Izuku glances between Recovery Girl as she shuts the door behind her and steps into the room with a clipboard and where Kacchan sleeps, his breath blowing over the blanket. Recovery Girl gives Izuku a long look before her eyes slide over to Kacchan.

“Ah, yes. After you fainted, Bakugou insisted on staying with you, even though it really would have been better to treat you without him hovering the entire time. It seemed less likely to result in property damage if we let him stay.” Recovery Girl huffs out a sigh, reaching over to adjust something on his IV drip machine.

“I fainted?” Izuku asks, because all he really remembers is fighting with Kacchan and then sitting down on the gym mat. It’s kind of vague in his mind, and he frowns, trying to remember.

“You did,” Recovery Girl confirms. “Gave us all quite a scare. You really should have told someone you were feeling ill, you know.”

“I-I wasn’t,” Izuku says, looking down to fidget with the edge of his blanket. Recovery Girl snorts, and he glances up to see her give him an unimpressed look.

“You were so anemic that I had to give you blood,” she says, jerking her head at the blood bag. “This is your second unit, you know. I would imagine you were feeling very poorly.”

Izuku shrugs, picking at a loose thread. “It wasn’t really that bad,” he murmurs, and Recovery Girl sighs.

“You didn’t want to worry anyone, did you?” She steps closer to him, reaching out to grab his wrist and press her fingers to the pulse point. “I used my quirk on you, and it seemed to help. You know what that suggests, don’t you? You’re a bright boy.”

Izuku swallows. “I-It means it was an injury?” he replies, his voice more of a question. Recovery Girl drops his wrist and makes a note on her clipboard, nodding.

“My quirk doesn’t work on illnesses, at least not for more than an hour or two,” she says, not looking up as she writes. “So, do you know how you ended up damaging your bone marrow, young man?”

Izuku blinks. “M-My bone marrow?” Recovery Girl nods, looking up from the clipboard.

“I healed your other injuries, as well,” she says, glancing meaningfully at his arm. Izuku looks down at the bare skin, uncovered with the short sleeved hospital gown. The cuts he’d put there the night before are gone, without even a scar. The gown is oversize enough to cover his silvery-light scars just above the elbow, but a couple below the joint are barely visible if he squints.

“Y-You--” Izuku starts, panic rising in his voice, but Recovery Girl cuts him off.

“Legally, I can’t share this with anyone,” she says. “I would like you to speak with someone about it, though.” Izuku nods, not meeting her eyes.

“I-I’m talking to Aizawa-sensei about it already,” he says, which isn’t really a lie.

“Good,” Recovery Girl says, sounding surprised. “I’m glad to hear that. There’s still the issue of

your illness, though. I'm sure it hasn't escaped your notice that this is nearly identical to the sickness you suffered from after the attack on USJ," she says, and when Izuku looks up to her, her face is grim.

"USJ?" he echoes, watching her nod.

"I'm afraid that this may mean that you have permanent damage from whatever quirk you were hit with," she says, reaching out to rest a cool hand on his shoulder. "It's not certain yet, but I'd like to run some blood tests twice a month for a while to keep an eye on things. Thankfully, you seem to be responding well to the transfusions." She nods to the IV line again and Izuku blinks, swallowing.

"R-Right," he says, his voice low. Recovery Girl gives him a sympathetic look.

"I know it's a lot," she says, voice soft. "I've spoken with your mother about it already, and in the case that you do have long term effects, we'll work together to get you set up with a specialist. For now though," she says, glancing to where Kacchan is lying on Izuku's shins, "get some rest, okay?"

Izuku nods numbly as Recovery Girl gives his shoulder a final squeeze before walking out of the room, her cane clinking against the tile. He swallows, his throat feeling thick and stiff as he hears the door shut. He watches, not surprised, exactly, as Kacchan cracks one eye open, clearly not just waking up. His friend sits up, a scowl forming on his features.

"Don't fucking tell anyone about that," he says, but there's no heat to his words.

"I won't," Izuku replies, looking past Kacchan more than at him. "How much did you hear?"

"Just from the part about the USJ or whatever. You'll be fine," Kacchan says, quietly. "A stupid quirk isn't going to stop your stubborn ass from being a hero."

Izuku nods, the movement jerky. "I know," he says. He wants to tell Kacchan that it isn't someone else's quirk, that it isn't something he can't control. That it's something he did to himself by being stupid, by pushing his limits too hard. *I guess I know to stop at the headache stage, now*, he thinks bitterly.

"You should have fucking said something," Kacchan mumbles. Izuku smiles slightly, the gesture feeling fake. It must look fake, too, because when he focuses his eyes on Kacchan, his friend's scowl deepens.

"Were you worried about me?" Izuku asks, raising an eyebrow slightly. Kacchan scoffs, rolling his eyes and crossing his arms over his chest.

"Of course not," he replies, but he doesn't meet Izuku's eyes and there's something that might be a hint of redness on his cheeks. Izuku takes a deep breath, twists his hands in the blankets.

"I guess I'll have to be more careful, next time," he whispers. He hates the way he can feel tears starting to prickle in the edges of his eyes. He hates the way Kacchan's gaze snaps back to him, the way Kacchan can definitely tell he's about to cry. He hates the way he's worried Kacchan, the way he'll surely be held back from physical training for at least a week after this, so soon to finals, too. He hates this whole situation, but it's not like he can reset and redo it when it's resetting too much that got him here in the first place.

Next time, he thinks, *I'll be more careful. Next time, nobody will find out.*

Chapter End Notes

cw: VERY GRAPHIC SUICIDE multiple times including methods. vomiting and hospitals as well

y'all didn't think we'd get a training montage arc without izuku trying to train his quirk, did you? this isn't just a filler arc, for the record :3 there is a method to my madness, as wild as it is. i actually meant this chapter to include one more scene and for the existing scenes to be shorter, but I had to fill out some more stuff because it just felt.... stilted. anyway I hope you're all doing well!!!! tysm as always for the comments and kudos, they feed my soul <3

discord: <https://discord.gg/Vqaj62ceCt>

training montage, part 3

Chapter Summary

last time: izuku kills himself in multiple new and creative ways! then passes out and gets his ass in the hospital

Chapter Notes

hiiiiii!!! there may not be an update tomorrow, as I'll be out of town!!! but for now, enjoy!!!

also this fic is ONE MONTH OLD!!!! i can't believe it's only been a month really, it's so long !! i really hope you've enjoyed this fic thus far, whether you're joining us later on or if you've been here since the beginning!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

When Izuku steps into the classroom the next day, he can immediately feel all eyes on him. It probably doesn't help that Kacchan walks in just before him, glaring at the class before shoving his way over to his seat and flopping down into it. Izuku glances across the classroom, his heart picking up slightly in his chest when he sees that *everyone* is staring, from Uraraka and Todoroki and Iida to Kacchan's friend group to Aoyama and Ojio. Izuku thinks Hagakure is staring, too, based on how her clothing is angled in her seat, but it's kind of hard to tell.

"Midoriya!" Kirishima says, walking toward him from where he'd been standing by Ashido's desk. "Dude, are you okay? You were out *cold* yesterday, it was kind of scary." He stops a few feet from Izuku, looking him over.

"I-I'm okay now," Izuku replies, ducking his head at the sudden attention. Kirishima hums, nodding.

"You look like you're better, for sure. You were all pale and shit yesterday. What happened, anyway? Are you sick?" He lifts a hand to Izuku's forehead, and Izuku feels his face flushing red as he shakes his head, taking a step back.

"I-I was, but I'm better now!" he chirps, and Kirishima nods with a smile, taking a step back. Behind him, Izuku can see most of the class watching.

"Good!" he says, grinning. From across the classroom, Kacchan snarls.

"Leave the idiot alone, Shitty Hair," he growls. "He's fucking fine now." Izuku blinks, eyes sliding to Kirishima again, but Kirishima seems unfazed, just tipping his head back and laughing as he walks back to his own seat.

"Sure thing, Blasty. You were pretty freaked out yesterday, yourself!" he says, nudging Kacchan's desk with his hip as he walks by. Kacchan growls like an angry dog, his eyes narrowing.

“Shut the fuck up,” Kacchan mumbles, his hands popping where they’re pressed to his desk. Izuku swallows, glancing around the class, but most people have turned away from him, seemingly satisfied. Izuku breathes a sigh of relief and walks to where Uraraka, Iida, Tsuyu, and Todoroki are sitting. They’re still watching him, of course, but that’s normal for them. *We’re friends, after all* .

“Hey, Deku!” Uraraka chirps, smiling at him as he slides into his seat. “Are you really feeling better? We were really worried about you.” Iida nods from next to her, his face serious.

“I-I’m really okay now,” Izuku replies, tugging his backpack off of his shoulder and onto the ground, unzipping it. “I was just anemic,” he says, pulling his notes out from his bag.

“Anemia can be pretty serious, ribbit,” Tsuyu says. “But I’m glad you’re feeling better, Midoriya.” Izuku nods, feeling his face heat slightly.

“Is it because of your abilities?” Todoroki asks, and Izuku can’t help the way his head shoots up to look at him, startled. “Knowledge can be a heavy burden to bear.”

“His what?” Uraraka asks, raising an eyebrow. “Todoroki, is this what you were talking about earlier?” Her voice is laden with amusement, and Izuku watches as Iida shakes his head.

“I’ve explained to you already, Todoroki. There is simply no way that Midoriya can see the future!” He chops a hand through the air with an air of authority. “It’s impossible.”

“Y-Yeah,” Izuku says, looking at the wooden surface of his desk. “I-I can’t see the future, really... I’m just good at guessing stuff, is all.” Izuku glances up to see Todoroki tip his head to the side slightly, his eyes narrowing in thought. He hums quietly.

“You may have them fooled, but I’m not convinced,” Todoroki says, with Uraraka snickering in the background. Izuku laughs along with her, even though he’s a little anxious about what Todoroki’s saying. His nerves jump up the tiniest bit as he sees Aizawa stepping into the classroom, shuffling through the doorway.

“Midoriya,” he says, stepping into his usual spot behind his desk. Izuku swallows.

“Y-Yes?” he asks, his voice cracking slightly. Aizawa doesn’t seem to notice or care.

“Stay behind after class,” he says, glancing up to make eye contact with Izuku. “I need to talk to you.”

“Ooh, someone’s in trouble,” Kaminari calls from across the classroom, and Izuku feels his face flaring red with a mix of embarrassment and nerves. Aizawa sighs.

“Kaminari, shut up,” he says, voice heavy with annoyance, and the murmur of laughter that rolls through the classroom is almost enough to soothe Izuku’s anxiety, but not quite.

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When the bell rings, Izuku stands up from his seat and slings his backpack over his shoulder, stepping up to stand in front of Aizawa’s desk. He doesn’t meet the man’s eyes, staring instead at the blackboard behind him, at the chalk writing there. He stares at the dust white lines, listening as his classmates slowly filter out of the room. He hears a soft sigh from his teacher, and he knows they’re alone.

“Midoriya,” he says. “I’ve spoken with you before about being honest with regard to your health.” Izuku glances up, seeing his teacher almost glaring at him. “So why, exactly, did you not say you

were feeling ill *before* starting a physical exercise?” His eyebrow twitches, and Izuku recognizes that he’s angry with him. Izuku bites at his bottom lip.

“I-I wasn’t feeling bad,” he says, shuffling his feet. Aizawa sighs, running a hand through his messy hair.

“Problem child,” Aizawa says, his brow twitching. “I’m not an idiot. If you’re sick enough to need a *blood transfusion*, you’ve been feeling bad for a while.” Izuku swallows, then nods, hesitantly.

“I just thought I was tired, really,” he says, looking at the wood of Aizawa’s desk instead of his face. “I didn’t feel that bad until I started exercising, I swear. It won’t happen again.”

“Midoriya.” Aizawa’s voice is firm, and Izuku glances up to meet his eyes. “You’re not in trouble for being sick. You understand that, right? You’re in trouble for not telling anyone before it got to the point of you passing out. You could have been seriously hurt if that had happened during a different exercise.”

“R-Right,” Izuku says, his voice quiet. “I’ll tell you, next time,” he says, but the words sound hollow. Aizawa narrows his eyes at him.

“I certainly hope you will,” he says, sighing. “Dismissed. Mic already knows I’m speaking with you, so don’t worry about a pass.” Izuku nods, turning and practically running from the room.

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It’s probably a little soon for Izuku to go back out on the streets, but it’s a clear, cool night, and he can’t resist. His mom had asked him to wait a week, just until he was sure he was feeling better, but he’s been lying to enough people lately that he only feels a little bad for sneaking out as soon as she’d gone to sleep.

The streets are louder in the summertime, the crickets and the cicadas singing a quiet whispering tune in the grass, the wind louder as it snakes between the buildings. Izuku’s a little out of the way from his usual patrol route, just a block to the east from his usual path, but he’d seen a familiar white capture scarf and decided he’d really rather not argue with Aizawa *again*. He doesn’t have the energy for it, not really.

So maybe it’s fate or chance or just good luck when Izuku sees them, tucked into an alley between two nightclubs, facing each other. Leadfoot is in her usual outfit, her metal platform boots gleaming dully in the light, but the man she faces is unfamiliar to Izuku. His skin is strange, warped with dark violet scars and held together with silver staples, gleaming bright even in the darkness. His eyes are a bright blue under his head of dark hair, and as he and Leadfoot glare at each other, Izuku slips into the shadow of the alley he’s standing in, just across from the two of them. He’s close enough that he can hear the scrape of metal on concrete as Leadfoot shifts slightly, her shoes grating on the ground.

“We’ve acquired the first target, yes,” she says, voice low. “I don’t know the details. It’s not really my area.” Izuku watches her fold her arms over her chest, the rings on her hands looking almost purple in the light of the pink neon sign above the nightclub to her back. The man sighs, rolling his eyes.

“I don’t have time to deal with whatever political shit you have going on. I just need you to uphold your side of the deal.” His hands are in the pockets of his ripped black jeans, but there’s no question that he could fight at any moment, the lines of his shoulders and back tight with tension. Leadfoot, in some ways, looks more relaxed than he does.

“It won’t be an issue,” she says, tapping her fingers against her suit sleeve. “But we won’t have the information until closer to the time, like I already told you. They haven’t even picked a location yet.”

“Sure,” the man says, rolling his eyes sarcastically. “You sure your source isn’t just lying to you? It’s convenient that we’re less than a month out and you still don’t have it.”

Leadfoot doesn’t seem fazed. “My source isn’t lying. They don’t have that option, not with our resources. You know that as well as I do.” She looks up and down his body, making a show of moving her head as she does. “If you betray the Gekkeiju, you get *burned*.” She tips her head slightly to the side, a strange violet glow gathering around the edges of her metal rabbit ear and the surface of her mask. “I think you’d know just how intimidating that can be.”

“Are you threatening me?” The man hisses, pulling a hand from his pocket and holding it up as blue flame erupts around it, crackling and bright. Izuku swallows, shrinking back when he realizes he can feel the heat of it from where he stands, even though he’s over twenty feet away.

“Far from it,” Leadfoot says, shaking her head. “If you don’t recognize a warning when you hear one, then what’s the point in giving it to you?” She sighs, unfolding her arms and spreading them slightly away from her. The metal bands on her arms and legs start to glow violet, even as they reflect the blue flame.

“What the fuck is that supposed to mean?” The man hisses, swiping at her with a handful of blue flame. Leadfoot jerks back, not even moving her limbs. It’s like she’s being dragged by the metal all over her, like it’s moving her body for her.

“It means,” she says, rising a few feet off of the ground. “Don’t lie at the meeting tomorrow. Don’t do something that will get you hurt for no reason.” She sighs, raising a hand to examine her knuckles, the blue light of the man’s flames reflecting off of the metal rings there.

“Sure sounds like a threat,” the man growls. Leadfoot drops her hand, looking down at him.

“Dabi,” she says, voice low. “Are you *really* that dense?” Dabi glares up at her, blue eyes the same shade as his fire.

“No,” he replies, his voice a grumble. “Doesn’t mean I’m going to thank you for it. I can take care of myself, bitch. We’re not friends.”

“Thank god for that,” Leadfoot murmurs. “If I have to see any of you after this stupid alliance ends, I’ll end you myself.” Dabi snorts, rolling his eyes.

“Then why the fuck are you warning me about your little group? What’s in it for you?” Dabi says, fire flickering around him, licking up the edges of the alleyway, blue and bright and hot. Izuku grits his teeth.

“Nothing,” Leadfoot says, rising up from the alleyway. “Don’t make me regret it.” Her feet brushes the edge of the roof next to her, and she steps onto it gracefully, her hair whipping in the wind. From this angle, Izuku can see a sliver of skin normally hidden by her mask, can make out a yellow bruise over her cheekbone. He wonders how she could have gotten hurt, there, if she’s always wearing a metal mask.

Izuku waits, watching from his dark corner, as Dabi leaves, swearing and mumbling to himself as he walks out of the alleyway and down the street, quelling his flame and shoving his hands back in his pockets. Izuku’s jaw is clenched so tight that it stings the muscles in his cheeks and temples,

but he finally, finally steps out of his hiding spot. He can't see either of the villains, can't hear either of their footsteps, but he still moves quietly as he slips back through the streets.

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Izuku plops down on the bench with a sigh, the cool metal soaking up some of his excess heat. He's practically dripping with sweat, and now more than ever he wishes he could take his shirt off. The sports uniform top is breathable, but the long sleeves are almost suffocating after his workout. Shinsou sits down next to him, wiping sweat off of his brow with a hand towel and grimacing.

"I feel like I'm dying," Shinsou grumbles, leaning back and leaning against the wall. "Is this what being a hero course student is like every day?"

Izuku shakes his head, unscrewing the lid from his water bottle. "No," he pants, taking a gulp of water. "Just training with Aizawa-sensei."

"You're insane," Shinsou says, his eyes sliding shut. "We're both insane. Remind me to never, ever show up to training on an empty stomach," he grumbles, the back of his head making a soft sound where it knocks against the wall of the gym. Izuku blinks, but it's Aizawa who speaks.

"Shinsou," he says, his voice low in warning. Izuku glances up to see him standing in front of them, his arms crossed over his chest. "Did I hear that correctly?" Izuku swallows. Aizawa manages to look as intimidating in a thin black workout tank top and sweatpants as he does in his hero costume. Shinsou seems less fazed, opening one eye to stare back at Aizawa. Izuku lifts his water bottle to his mouth.

"Depends on what you heard," Shinsou drawls, opening both eyes and sitting up, resting his elbows on his thighs and leaning forward. His pale skin is slightly flushed from exercise, but he manages to look bored anyway as he looks up at Aizawa. Izuku takes a sip of his water, trying not to make any noise.

"What have you eaten today?" Aizawa asks, staring Shinsou down. Shinsou sighs. Izuku swallows a mouthful of water.

"Nothing yet." His eyes slide to the side, looking at the ground. Izuku watches as Aizawa sighs dramatically, shaking his head.

"Why didn't you eat lunch?" He asks, scowling. Shinsou shrugs.

"Didn't feel like it," he mumbles. "Why does it matter?"

"You need to be fed well to train well," Aizawa replies, sighing. "It's dangerous to train without having eaten. I know you're smart enough to know that, Shinsou." His gaze shifts over to Izuku. "Midoriya," he says, and Izuku jumps a little in his seat.

"Y-Yes?" He sits up straight, holding his water bottle in both hands in his lap. Aizawa's eyes look to it before flickering back up to his face.

"Take Shinsou to get something to eat. I don't care what it is, just get some food into him. You should eat something too, while you're at it. Recovery Girl may have cleared you for training, but healing requires extra energy." He glances back to Shinsou. "We'll meet again in two days, same time. If you need money for lunch or somewhere to eat, come by my office." He turns, walking toward the gym's exit. Izuku blinks, glancing back over to see Shinsou scowling and looking at the floor.

“Um...” Izuku bites at his lip as he screws the lid back on his water bottle. “What do you want to eat?” Shinsou looks over at him, eyes narrowing.

“I’ll be fine on my own,” Shinsou snaps, standing up from the bench. He pauses, blinking, and Izuku can see him sway slightly and go pale. Izuku shoots up, holding up a hand to steady him, but Shinsou just gives himself a shake and glares at Izuku.

“Aizawa-sensei would be mad at both of us if I didn’t take you to get *something*,” Izuku reasons, even as Shinsou starts for the door, not looking at him.

“Aizawa’s already mad at me,” Shinsou says. “I don’t need your pity.”

Izuku follows after him, scrambling to catch up to him. “I-It’s not pity,” he says, giving Shinsou a smile. “Sensei was right that I should eat something, so I-I would have gone anyway.”

“Fine,” Shinsou says, looking at Izuku. “But you’re paying.” Izuku wonders if that’s why Shinsou hasn’t eaten, but he doesn’t dare ask. Instead, he nods as they step out into the sunlight, the sounds of their feet on the sidewalk filling the gaps between their words.

“There’s a store not far from here that has some stuff,” Izuku says, giving Shinsou a smile. “What kind of stuff do you like?”

Shinsou shrugs. “I’m not picky,” he answers. “Food is food.” A bird chirps from the lawn to their left, hopping through the grass and picking at the ground. Izuku hums, looking forward. The sun hasn’t set, yet, but it’s close to, and the sky is a bright, saturated blue.

“O-Okay!” Izuku chirps, stepping forward to lead the way. Shinsou walks just a step behind him, his hands in the pockets of his sports uniform. Izuku wonders, briefly, if he should suggest they change, but he doesn’t really want to have to explain to Shinsou why he changes in the bathroom stalls instead of in the locker room. It’s not like he hasn’t gone to this store in his uniform before, anyway.

They walk along the street in near silence, the scuffing of Shinsou’s shoes loud against the concrete. Izuku’s own steps are quieter, softer and gentler. Even though he’s not sneaking right now, he’s started to walk more quietly, just by muscle memory. As they step out of UA’s front gate, Izuku hears the sounds of distant cars, the sound of a horn honking far away. He glances to Shinsou only to see that the boy is staring at him, his violet eyes half lidded. When their gazes meet, Izuku looks away, his eyes moving to the ground.

“Um, Shinsou?” he asks, voice soft. “I’m sorry.” Their shadows are stretched out on the concrete in front of them, long and dark. Izuku hears Shinsou make a confused noise from beside him.

“What are you talking about?” Shinsou says, scoffing. Izuku bites his lip, not looking at him.

“At the sports festival, when you said that--that you should have been in the hero course?” Izuku kicks his foot against the ground, making a loud scuffing noise. “You were right. I-I’m sorry.” He hears a soft choking noise and glances over to Shinsou, startled. His face is painted with shock, his eyes open wide and his mouth open just slightly.

“Midoriya, I only said that to get you to respond,” Shinsou says, shaking his head slightly, his brows twitching down slightly. Izuku bites at his lip, searching Shinsou’s face. He thinks he sees something in Shinsou’s eyes, a hint of guilt or regret or *something*.

“Is that the only reason?” Izuku says softly, feeling his lips tug down slightly. Shinsou blinks, then barks out a startled laugh.

“You’ve been spending way too much time with Aizawa, dude,” he says, shaking his head. “And for the record, I’m sorry about what I said,” he glances down, his purple eyes trained on the ground. “Even if I was trying to use my quirk on you, it was still... I was still being an ass.” He mumbles slightly, and Izuku blinks.

“It’s okay,” Izuku replies, smiling just a little bit. “Did I really sound like sensei?”

“Yeah,” Shinsou snorts, shaking his head and sliding his hands into his pockets. “I’m surprised he cared about me missing lunch.”

Izuku laughs nervously. “Yeah, if he thinks you’re bad at taking care of yourself, he’ll hound you about it. He asks me almost every day if I’ve eaten and slept. It’s kind of annoying.” He rubs a hand on the back of his head, thinking back to Aizawa’s pestering. It had toned down a little bit, but with him getting sick a few days ago, he’d started to ask every day again.

“Really?” Shinsou blinks, shaking his head. “I didn’t think a teacher would care that much.”

Izuku nods. “Right? UA is pretty amazing, after all,” he throws a grin to Shinsou. “I can’t wait until you’re in our class full time.” Shinsou’s eyes widen, his mouth opening slightly, and he blinks, chock clear on his face. Izuku points to the store up ahead. “Oh, we’re here!” Izuku picks up his pace, almost jogging. He turns his head back to see Shinsou staring after him, stopped in place, and Izuku turns to walk backwards, giving him a smile.

“C’mon!” He says, waving Shinsou toward him. “I’m hungry!” Shinsou nods, blinking as he hurries forward to catch up with Izuku.

“Did you mean that?” he murmurs, voice quiet as Izuku turns back to walk forward. Izuku blinks, tipping his head slightly to the side.

“About you being in our class?” Izuku pauses, watching Shinsou nod. “Yeah! It’ll be great. You’ll fit right in,” he says, pushing open the door to the store. Shinsou blinks, shaking his head.

“Even though I’m such a dick to you?” Shinsou asks as they step into the store, the cool air of the air conditioning hitting Izuku’s face, cooling the sweat there. Izuku shrugs.

“I’m used to people being mean to me,” he says, leading Shinsou over to the fridge with rice balls in it. “What’s your favorite flavor? I’m going to get tarako, I think.”

“Just because you’re used to it doesn’t make it okay,” Shinsou says, half mumbling as he reads the labels of the onigiri. “I’ll get salmon.” Izuku nods, opening the fridge and taking out two of each flavor, nestling them in the crook of his arm as he pulls each one out. He steps back, and Shinsou shuts the fridge for him, his eyes on the rice balls.

“It’s okay, really,” Izuku says with a smile. “I’m not bothered by it. Here,” he says, passing Shinsou the two salmon rice balls.

“Two?” Shinsou asks, staring at them as he takes them. “You don’t have to--”

“I want to,” Izuku insists. “You didn’t eat lunch, right? You need them both.” He grins as Shinsou stares down at them.

“Thank you,” he mumbles, glancing back up at Izuku. Izuku smiles, and there’s something bright and happy in his chest as they step up to the counter to pay.

--

Izuku is walking to the gym when he gets a message, his phone buzzing in his pocket. He pulls it out, frowning when he sees the text from Mirio.

Hey Deku! Something came up and All Might and I can't make training. I'm sorry it's so short notice. Izuku bites at his lips, typing out a reply.

It's okay! I'll train on my own. I hope everything's okay. He kind of wishes that they were able to train with him, and he can't deny that he's a little disappointed they can't meet with him. He pauses, standing outside of the gym and shuffling his weight between his feet and chewing at his bottom lip before opening his messaging app again.

Hey Kacchan, he types out. *What are you doing right now?* He hesitates over the send button for a minute before pressing it. He's not sure that Kacchan will reply, not even sure that he's free, but Izuku *knows* school's out for him and it can't hurt, right? Worst case, Kacchan will just be annoyed at him.

Going to the gym, comes the reply. *Why?* Izuku fumbles to type the next text.

My training with All Might was cancelled, he replies, and Kacchan texts back almost immediately.

Train with me then idiot , he replies, and Izuku smiles.

Where? He sends. *I'm outside gym gamma rn.*

Come to gym omega , Kacchan texts back. *I'm warming up.* Izuku stashes his phone in his pocket and starts to jog towards the building, using the short distance to the other gym to stretch his legs. It's only a few hundred feet until he's at the door, tugging on the handle and opening it. The air conditioning rushes out at him as he steps inside, blinking in the relative darkness compared to the bright light of the afternoon sun. Izuku walks over to the bench and toes off his shoes as he glances across the room to where Kacchan is crouched on the floor, doing leg stretches.

"H-Hey Kacchan!" Izuku calls, giving Kacchan a grin as he pulls off his socks. "T-Thank you for letting me train with you today," he says, walking over to him. Kacchan raises an eyebrow, staring at him while he leans over and stretches his other leg.

"Yeah, whatever," he says, huffing out a breath of air. "You gonna hold the bag for me?" He asks, jerking his head over to a punching bag in the corner of the room. "We'll practice kicks and then we can spar or some shit."

Izuku nods quickly, shuffling over to the bag and grabbing onto it, holding it against his hip and resting his hands on the side of it. He looks over the side of the bag as Kacchan stands up, cracking his knuckles and walking over to him. Kacchan stands in front of him in a fighting stance, hands up and knees bent, and Izuku, suddenly, feels the need to explain.

"It's my quirk," he says, not looking at Kacchan's eyes, just holding the punching bag still and staring at the ground, at Kacchan's bare feet on the mat.

"What?" Kacchan says, confusion in his voice. "What the fuck are you talking about?" he asks, twisting forward and kicking the bag.

"When I get sick, it's my quirk," Izuku says. He braces himself, feels the satisfying impact as Kacchan lands a solid hit on the bag.

"I figured, you had a fever during the sports festival. That's a shitty fucking drawback," he says, slightly out of breath from training. "It better do something pretty fucking awesome if it puts you in

the hospital every time you use it.”

“It’s not every time,” Izuku says. “Just if I use it a bunch of times in a row. And I don’t always go to the hospital.”

Kacchan snorts. “I’ve never even seen you use it, and I see you getting sick.” He throws a punch, his fist smacking against the bag.

“I’ve used it in front of you,” Izuku says, swallowing. “You just can’t tell, that’s part of how it works.”

“Are you ever going to fucking tell me what it is?” Kacchan asks, punctuating his sentence with a solid kick, horizontal from his hip and strong enough to make Izuku stumble slightly.

“I-I will,” Izuku says, quietly. “Eventually.”

“Hm,” Kacchan grunts in lieu of an answer.

Izuku shrugs, adjusting his grip. “It’s not that I don’t trust you, it’s just that... you won’t like it.” He looks up to see Kacchan raising an eyebrow.

“I won’t like it? What the fuck does that mean? It’s got to be pretty powerful if you’re using it enough to get yourself sick, yeah?” Kacchan steps away from the bag, circling around to face Izuku, and Izuku lets go of the bag, sighing.

“You won’t like the activation requirements,” he says, folding his arms over his chest protectively. “They’re... you wouldn’t like them, Kacchan.”

“Why not?” Kacchan asks, folding his arms over his chest and staring Izuku down. “What the fuck are they?”

Izuku shrugs, not meeting his eyes. As much as it’s nice to talk to Kacchan about the quirk, to have *someone* who knows, it’s not good for his heart to think about how Kacchan would react to knowing.

“Your quirk affects time,” Kacchan says, and Izuku’s gaze snaps up, “doesn’t it?”

“H-How did you-” Izuku cuts himself off as Kacchan shrugs, arching a brow at him.

“It’s kind of fucking obvious. I’m not the only one who’s noticed you seem to know shit you shouldn’t all the time, and you just told me that you’ve used it in front of me and I couldn’t tell. It sounds like you’re doing something with time or seeing the future or some shit.” Kacchan narrows his eyes. “Or are you reading minds?”

Izuku swallows. “I-It’s time,” he says, voice shaking. “You got it right the first time.” Kacchan glares at him.

“Was that a fucking pun?” He snarls, and Izuku blinks, holding back a laugh.

“N-No, not on purpose, I swear!” He says, holding his hands up in surrender. Kacchan snorts out a laugh, shaking his head as he rolls his eyes.

“So, you can go back in time or some shit?” he asks, red eyes meeting Izuku’s gaze. Izuku twists his face, biting at his lip and frowning.

“Kind of...” He shrugs, shuffling back over to the punching bag. “Let’s just train, Kacchan.” He

feels eyes on him even as he looks away from Kacchan, his gaze tracing the ground instead.

“Fine,” Kacchan grunts out, and when Izuku glances up, he seems him settling back into a fighting stance. “But you’re fucking telling me one day.”

Izuku smiles faintly, more of a grimace than anything. “Right,” he says, bracing as Kacchan kicks the bag.

Chapter End Notes

cw: none i don't think?

btw, there should be one more chap in this arc before the final exams!!!

thank you as always for the comments! ik im behind on replying to them, but i'll get to them i swear!

discord: <https://discord.gg/Vqaj62ceCt>

training montage, part 4

Chapter Summary

last time: izuku bonds with shinsou and kacchan :D

Chapter Notes

HEY FOLKS HIIIIHHI

sorry again for missing yesterday's update!! i had a ton of fun at my bf's house and now I'm back! here's the final installment of the training montage arc for you :3 next chapter will be final exams!!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

It's a cool, clear night when Izuku is approached by Eraserhead. It's strange, because as much as Izuku talks to Aizawa, he doesn't really come up to Izuku as Ace much, not like this. It's clear from the way he swings himself up to the roof Izuku is crouched on that he's been looking for Izuku, that he's been hoping to find him. His capture weapon shines dully in the moonlight, and his goggles glint as he lands beside Izuku, his legs bent slightly.

"Ace," he says, and he sounds almost relieved. "Where have you been?" Izuku blinks, standing up from his kneeling position and tipping his head to the side slightly.

"What do you mean?" Izuku frowns. "I've been out the normal amount, I think."

"The situation has changed," Aizawa says. "You need to be more careful." Something about the low edge to his voice, something in the crook of his brows worries Izuku.

"What happened?" Izuku asks, folding his arms over his chest. "Why is the situation any different now than it was before?"

Aizawa sighs, low and slow. "You've met Avenging Angel," he says, not a question.

"I have," Izuku replies anyway.

"She's gone missing," Eraserhead says, turning to look out to the east, where the crescent moon is hanging low in the sky. "She was taken from her hotel during a mission. There were signs of a struggle." Izuku blinks and bites at his lip, because *oh*, he doesn't really *know* her, but the picture Aizawa paints is still concerning on its own.

"Do you know who took her?" Izuku asks, and Aizawa shakes his head.

"Ace, you don't get it," he hisses. "I'm not asking for your help with this. I'm asking you to *stay away*. Avenging Angel is a trained, licensed hero, and she was taken from a secure location during a secret mission. You are a teenager with no training," Aizawa says, his voice a growl. Izuku bites at his lower lip.

“I can use my quirk to try and get information on where she’s being held,” he offers, holding his hands out, palms up. His once-bright red gloves are now stained dark, almost black in places. “The League and the Gekkeiju are still working together. I think it’s likely the Gekkeiju are the ones who have her, based on something I heard earlier. I could--”

“Ace,” Eraserhead cuts him off, pressing a hand to his face. “What part of ‘stay away’ is confusing to you? Are you unable to process the words? Is there some aspect of your quirk that necessitates you being suicidally reckless?” Izuku can’t help but snort out a laugh at that, and as he catches himself, giggles rising in his chest, Aizawa drops his hand from his face. His eyes narrow behind his slitted gold goggles.

“There is,” he says, voice full of a warning, “isn’t there? Oh my god,” he breathes, shaking his head. “You said you have to be in danger for your quirk to work. How *much* danger, exactly, do you have to be in?” Aizawa steps forward, and Izuku steps back. He thinks he sees a flash of red behind the goggles.

“Uh,” Izuku says, glancing around. “I don’t want to talk about this?” Yeah, Aizawa is *definitely* activating his quirk, his hair starting to float up in pieces that rise above his head. “Can you turn the Erasure off, please? I-It’s making me nervous.”

Eraserhead frowns. “I’ll turn it off if you explain your quirk to me,” he says, the glint of his red eyes bright in the darkness of the night. Izuku shakes his head, his head beating fast in his chest as he takes another step back.

“No,” Izuku replies, shaking his head again. “I don’t want to.” His breathing feels weird, like it’s stuttering in his throat. He can’t get enough air.

“Why not?” Aizawa asks, confusion and something like worry plain on his face.

“I-I can’t,” Izuku says, his words shaky and full of breath. If he dies with his quirk erased, he *dies*. “Give me my quirk back, *please*, ” he begs, his voice cracking. Aizawa’s brows furrow, dropping low to his goggles, and he drops his quirk, his hair falling around his face. He steps forward, reaching out for Izuku, and Izuku isn’t sure why he’s dizzy all of sudden, but Aizawa guides him into a sitting position on the concrete rooftop with a firm hand on his shoulder.

“Ace?” he says, voice soft. “You’re okay. Take deep breaths.” Izuku blinks, staring at Aizawa’s shadow on the grey concrete, on the rough surface. He doesn’t know why it’s hard to breathe, doesn’t know why he’s freaking out, but he forces himself to suck in a breath of air, and Aizawa nods, rubbing slow circles into his shoulder blade.

“S-S-Sorry,” Izuku chokes out. “I-I just--”

“It’s okay,” Aizawa says. “You don’t need to explain. I shouldn’t have pushed you like that.” He sighs. “It’s so easy to forget how young you are.”

Izuku swallows. “I-I can use my quirk to help you,” he says, voice still uneven. “Why don’t you want me to help?”

“It’s not your responsibility to help,” Aizawa says, voice still low and soothing. “You shouldn’t put yourself in danger for the sake of others.” Izuku shakes his head, raising a hand to brush away Aizawa’s grip on his shoulder. Aizawa lets him, his hand coming to rest on the concrete between them instead.

“Isn’t that what a hero does?” Izuku asks, voice bitter. “Suffers so other people don’t have to?” He

looks away from Aizawa, out toward the city, to the buildings with golden lights shining in some windows, black darkness in others. The stars that twinkle faintly in the navy blue backdrop seem brighter tonight, somehow.

“No,” Aizawa says, voice clear even though it’s so quiet. “A hero’s job is to prevent suffering, not shoulder the burden themselves.” He sighs. “You remind me of a friend I once had,” he says, almost a whisper. Izuku leans forward, pulls his knees up to his chest and wraps his arms around them.

“I do?” Izuku replies, his own voice soft as he sets his chin on the top of one of his knees.

“Yeah,” Aizawa murmurs. “He passed away a while back.” Izuku blinks, swallows.

“Oh,” he says. “I’m sorry.” Aizawa shrugs, and Izuku can feel the movement through how close they are.

“Don’t be. Just don’t let yourself become another sad story,” Aizawa replies, and Izuku looks over to see that he’s pulled his goggles down to rest around his neck. With the way he’s looking at Izuku, with soft eyes and concern, Izuku almost feels like he’s in class, like he’s Izuku and not Ace. It’s deceptive.

“I’ll try my best,” Izuku replies, sighing and focusing on *not* sounding like Izuku, on not giving himself away any more than his freak out probably already did. “You should let me help this time, though. I won’t be dead in the end.”

“I’m not comfortable asking someone the same age as my students to risk their life for information,” Aizawa replies, and it’s Izuku’s turn to shrug, a smile quirking up the edges of his lips even though he knows Aizawa can’t see it through his mask.

“You’re not asking, I’m offering,” he says, lacing his gloved fingers together where they’re holding his knees. “My quirk--I’ve been calling it Mulligan--it lets me see the future, in certain circumstances. So I could use it to look and see if Avenging Angel shows up in any of the possible futures.”

Aizawa tips his head slightly, frowning. “Mulligan, huh. I thought you needed to be in danger to use it.” He sounds contemplative. “I’d be more comfortable with this if I knew more details about the quirk.”

Izuku chuckles. “You’re not going to be able to find me through a quirk registration,” he says, rolling his eyes. “My quirk is registered as something else entirely.”

“I know,” Aizawa says. “There aren’t any foresight quirk users registered in your age group, much less fitting your description.” Izuku isn’t surprised he’s checked, all things considered.

“I told you, I’m forty-six,” he says, laughter in his voice. Aizawa raises an eyebrow.

“Last time you said fifty-six,” he says, chuckling. Izuku sits back, stretching his legs out in front of him.

“Mulligan lets me see the future when I’m in mortal danger,” Izuku says, leaning back on his arms and tipping his head back to look up at the sky. “It sort of functions like a danger sensor, too, because I can feel when I can use it. That’s why I got so nervous when you erased it. I had no idea if I was in danger or not,” he explains. The lies come easily, because he’s spent many, many hours designing and analyzing this quirk. It fills multiple pages of a secret notebook, and he’s more than prepared his cover story. It’s almost nice to share it, now.

“Mortal danger,” Aizawa says. “You’re not in mortal danger right now though, are you? But you offered to use it.” Izuku hums in response.

“There’s a loophole for that,” he says, waving a hand. “An exploit. But that’s not important. Mulligan lets me draw cards from a deck of possible futures, so to speak, and each one shows me a potential future that could happen and how to get there,” he says. “It’s only a short distance into the future, and I can only use it about four or five times right now, but it has its uses.”

Aizawa grunts. “Hm. What happens if you use it more than that?” His tone is too thoughtful for Izuku’s tastes.

“I get a migraine,” Izuku says. “And any more futures I see are less and less fortunate,” he adds in, for good measure. “Kind of useless to get ones that are obviously bad paths to take in the first place, y’know?” He sighs, shifting forward and crossing his legs under him. “So, I could look at a couple of futures, if you want me to. A lot of times, they contain useful information.”

“You could,” Aizawa says, frowning. “I don’t like the sound of this ‘loophole,’” he says, voice a grumble. Izuku shrugs.

“You don’t have to like it,” he says, ignoring Aizawa’s glare at that comment. “How’s this? I’ll meet you back here in say, an hour,” he hops to his feet, stretching his hands above his head. Aizawa rises slowly beside him. “I’ll use my quirk once or twice, and I’ll let you know if I find anything.” Izuku bounces on his feet, grinning at him and hoping it’s at least semi-visible through the mask. Aizawa sighs, reaching to the goggles at his neck and pulling them up to cover his eyes. It’s easy enough to see his eyes through them at this angle, and the shadow of his face blocks some of the light from the moon, making the gold look almost like a dusty bronze.

“Fine,” Aizawa says. “But answer one question for me, first.” He folds his arms over his chest, staring Izuku down through his goggles. Izuku tips his head slightly to the side.

“Sure,” he says, even though he can feel his nerves bubbling in his chest just slightly. “What is it?”

“Do you have somewhere to go home to?” Aizawa asks, his voice serious. “Actually, no. Do you have somewhere *safe* to go home to?” His gaze is dark and serious, and Izuku swallows.

“I do,” he answers, voice quiet. “I have a home, and it’s safe.” He doesn’t want to give anything else away, but something warm and fluttery moves in his stomach at the thought that Aizawa worries about him even when he’s not on the streets.

“Good,” Aizawa says, a tension Izuku hadn’t noticed bleeding out of his shoulders. “I’m glad.” His voice is quiet, soft, and Izuku can’t take it anymore.

“I’ll be right back,” he says, even though he has no idea where he’ll reset to. He turns from where Aizawa is still watching him and slips off of the edge of the roof onto the fire escape below. His boots clank against the metal, and he walks down the stairs, his neck prickling like he’s being watched, but he doesn’t turn back to check.

Izuku weaves through the city, taking the long route to the bar he’d overheard Shigaraki and Leadfoot talking in once, many nights ago. He doesn’t *think* Eraserhead is following him, but he certainly wouldn’t put it past the man to try. It’s only a few blocks away, as is, and it takes him about ten minutes to cross the city and to slip into the alleyway between the bar and the apartment building next door. He wonders, briefly, if that’s part of the League’s operations, too, but he’s distracted by the sound of voices.

“You’re cheating!” Shigaraki’s voice shouts, loud and rough. “I’m going to fucking kill you, you fucking lizard ass--”

“Shut up,” another voice, male and unfamiliar says. “I’m not cheating, you just suck.” Izuku presses himself to the wall of the building, his back on the cool stone next to the rickety metal door. If he strains his ears, he can hear the sounds of music and artificial, quiet voices. He narrows his eyes, straining to hear.

“Shigaraki,” an older voice says. “We’re out of soda.” Izuku knows this voice, has heard it before, but he can’t place it, can’t put a name to it.

“Then go get more,” Shigaraki replies, annoyance in his voice. “I’m *busy*, Dabi.” *Oh*. Izuku remembers, now.

“You’re the one who drank the last one,” Dabi gripes, and Izuku can hear a door slamming from inside the bar. “And playing Mario Kart does *not* count as busy, asshole.”

“Yes it does,” Shigaraki snaps back at him. Izuku hears a loud sigh from inside, accompanied by footsteps, and he realizes that someone is moving towards the door. He pushes himself off the wall, taking off down the street away from the bar. He thinks he gets away in time, but just in case, he scales a fire escape and throws himself off of it, head first. *It can’t hurt to erase any risk*, he tells himself.

--

Izuku blinks his eyes open and glances around, seeing a familiar rooftop and an even more familiar figure beside him. He’s at the edge of the roof, looking down to the fire escape below, and when he turns to look at Aizawa, the man raises an eyebrow.

“You good, kid?” Aizawa asks, folding his arms over his chest. His goggles are on, so this must have been near the end of their conversation. Izuku nods.

“I just used my quirk,” he says, and Aizawa tips his head to the side slightly. “I don’t know about the Gekkeiju, but I don’t think the League has any captives right now. They’re playing video games.” Izuku pauses, chewing on the inside of his lip. “They’ve got new members, though. One of them uses blue fire.”

“I thought you said you’d be back in an hour,” Aizawa says, but he sounds like he’s thinking more than anything. “New members, huh?”

“Yeah,” Izuku confirms, nodding and stepping away from the edge of the roof. “There’s at least two, but I didn’t hear Kurogiri so I don’t think they were all there, anyway.” He picks at the bottom hem of his hoodie as Aizawa tilts his head.

“What do you mean by hear?” he asks, and there’s no accusation in his tone but Izuku bristles anyway, crossing his arms over his chest in a mirror of Aizawa’s stance.

“I was eavesdropping, in the future I saw,” he says. “You don’t happen to know where any Gekkeiju members are tonight, do you?” he asks, but Aizawa’s shaking his head before he’s even finished.

“No, I don’t. I’m curious to know how you knew where the League would be, though,” he says. A gust of wind, warm and quick blows around them, pushing strands of Aizawa’s long, tangled hair up into the air.

"I'm sure you are," Izuku says, shrugging. Aizawa sighs, so Izuku explains. "I know at least one of their meeting locations, but I don't think it's their main base."

"Of course you do," Aizawa sighs, shaking his head. "I'll just assume that there's no point in telling you to stay away from villain groups," he says, scowling. "You have my number already, don't you? Be sure to use it if you're in trouble."

Izuku arches a brow. "What, so you can figure out my civilian identity that way?" He does his best to glare at Aizawa from under his goggles, but he's pretty sure it doesn't work. Aizawa doesn't seem fazed in the slightest.

"No, so I can *help* you if you're in danger," Aizawa answers, using the same tone of voice he usually reserves for answering stupid questions in class, slow and exaggerated like what he's saying is obvious.

"Sure," Izuku says, looking away from him. "I'll call you if I need you to save my life," he says, even though he knows perfectly well he doesn't need any help with saving his own life. *My quirk will do that for me*.

"See that you do," Aizawa replies, tone serious. "Be careful, Ace. Avenging Angel is strong. If they could capture her, capturing you would be easy."

"Wow, you really have no confidence in my abilities," Izuku comments, looking back at Aizawa over his shoulder as he walks back to the edge of the roof, bending his knees in preparation for jumping down to the fire escape. "See ya around, Eraser."

Aizawa doesn't reply, but Izuku can feel his eyes following him as he jumps from the roof and walks down the fire escape stairs.

--

Izuku pushes open the door to the store, the bell at the top of the glass door chiming softly as he steps inside. He hasn't been back here since that last time, since Miura confronted him, and even though it's been over a month, anxiety prickles in his chest as the door shuts behind him and he hears footsteps.

"Hello! How can I--" Miura rushes out of one of the aisles, wearing a violet sundress under her apron. Izuku blinks in surprise when he sees her face, which mirrors the same shock. "Oh, Midoriya! I'd thought I'd scared you away," she says, raising a hand to rub the back of her head sheepishly and smiling, but Izuku can't look away from the dark bruising that covers her nose and spreads to the undersides of both of her eyes. There's a line of white tape on her nose, which is clearly broken, judging from the swelling and the watercolor bruises, and her lip is split in two places, her mouth and jaw bruised as well. Izuku thinks he can see makeup covering some of it, but it's been rubbed off around her mouth, and as he examines her, he can see bruises on her kneecaps and on her elbows as well as scattered throughout her body.

"M-Miura," he gasps. "What happened?" The more Izuku looks at her, the more injuries he can see, and under his gaze, Miura shifts uneasily, tugging her dress down so that it covers the bruises on her knees. It doesn't do much to hide the scrapes and bruises on her knuckles or face, though.

"I-I fell down the stairs," she says, glancing to the side. Her dark brown, nearly black eyes don't meet Izuku's. "I'm okay, really. It just looks bad because I bruise easy."

"Your nose is broken," Izuku points out, and Miura shrugs, putting a smile back on her face. It

looks like it hurts.

“It is, but it’ll heal!” She chirps, shrugging. “What about you? How have you been? I saw you in the sports festival, you were amazing!” her voice brightens more with every word, her smile widening. Izuku blinks.

“O-Oh, I’ve been good!” he answers, shrugging and glancing to the side, his face flushing ever-so-slightly. “You really watched that?” he asks, kind of embarrassed. He’s seen the footage, of course, of him biting people like a wild animal and passing out at the end of his fight with Kacchan. He knows it was what it took for him to win, but some part of him still wishes he could have done it without fighting dirty.

“I did!” Miura says, nodding. “You didn’t tell me you went to UA.” She bites at her bottom lip for a second, then pauses. “Sorry, I totally forgot to ask. What brings you in today?”

Izuku glances around the store, seeing it mostly the same as before. “I was wondering if you sold throwing knives,” he says, peering down the aisle he knows leads to the knives in general. “I’ve been learning how to use them at school, but I want to be able to practice at home.” And he wants to use them as Ace, but he’s not going to share that with her.

“Hm,” she hums in response, turning and taking a few steps into the aisle nearest her. “Y’know, I think I’ve got a set that would work for you,” she says, and Izuku follows her as she walks further down the aisle, leading him to a shelf that’s really more of a mess than a display of any kind. She reaches up, pulling down a black case, and tugs off of the shelf. It looks heavy, judging by the way her face twists with the motion, and she sets it on the ground in front of them, crouching down to open it.

She pulls back the lid of the case, revealing an assortment of knives, all in various sets and bundled together in clear plastic. Izuku blinks as his eyes run over the blades, counting them and realizing there’s at least a dozen *sets* of knives in the case, all of different shapes and sizes and metals, from the looks of it. Miura hums, biting at her lower lip as she sorts through them, pulling out a plastic-wrapped set of identical silvery knives, small and light looking.

“These should work,” she says, passing them over to Izuku. “Give me a sec and I can get you a case for them, too.” Izuku accepts the bundle of knives, feeling the weight of the metal in his palms. He turns the bundle over, counting eight thin knives to the set. Each blade is curved and double sided, with plain silver hilts that have holes in the ends, like they’re meant to be hung on a belt. Izuku supposes they probably are.

“How much are these?” he asks, examining the blades. It’s hard to tell through the wrapping, but they’re clearly very sharp.

“On the house!” Miura calls back from where she’s disappeared down another aisle. “But you have to do me a favor, okay?”

Izuku frowns. “These look expensive,” he points out. “What kind of favor?” He watches as Miura steps back into the aisle he’s standing in, a red and black case in her hands. She holds it out to him, and he takes it, feeling the armored inside to it. *The knives won’t cut through this on accident, that’s for sure.*

“UA is having a summer training camp soon, right?” She asks, and Izuku glances up at her to see her biting at her lip again, the cut on the bottom of it open and bleeding slightly.

“R-Right,” Izuku confirms, nodding. Aizawa had told them about it only a few days ago, during

homeroom. *How would she know that, though ?*

“Be careful,” Miura says, meeting Izuku’s eyes with a serious stare. “Stay with your teachers. Don’t go off on your own. And don’t take any risks,” she says, and there’s something oddly familiar about her voice, something he can’t place.

“I-I’ll be careful,” he says, frowning, his brow furrowing. “Why are you--”

“Don’t ask,” Miura says. “Please. Just look after yourself.”

“I will,” Izuku replies, confusion swirling in his mind. Even as he leaves the shop, new knives in their case, he can’t shake the feeling that something is horribly wrong. He examines the case, the red and black of it, and it occurs to him that he hadn’t asked for those colors. *It could be a coincidence, but ...* Izuku gives himself a shake. *I have bigger things to worry about than Miura. Final exams are coming up .*

--

Izuku’s leaning over his desk, his face practically pressed to the wooden surface as he scribbles into the margins of his notes, underlining important information and writing questions to ask his teachers next week in class. He’s only sort of paying attention to the rest of the class as they chit chat, but Kirishima pipes up, nice and loud, and his voice is kind of hard to ignore.

“Bakugou, can’t you just walk him through it?” Kirishima asks, and when Izuku looks up, he’s sitting in front of Kacchan, leaning forward on his elbows, his chin on one hand. Next to him, Kaminari looks like he’s about to cry, both of his hands fisted in his blonde hair and mussing it up, his face slightly red and his eyes open wide. He’s staring down at his notes.

“If he doesn’t know how to do it at this point, he’s not gonna fucking get it by the exam,” Kacchan snaps. “What did you get, Shitty Hair? Even *Deku* knows how to do this,” he sneers, glancing over his shoulder to where Izuku is staring, his red eyes flitting down to Izuku’s notes, which admittedly don’t contain any unsolved problems. Izuku feels his face start to heat red at being called out, but thankfully he’s saved from having to respond by Kaminari groaning loudly and slamming his face down into the desk.

“It’s over, guys,” he whines, voice muffled by the desk. “I’m gonna flunk out first semester. Just take me out back and put me out of my misery.” Kirishima reaches out and pats him on the back, a sympathetic look on his face.

“You’ll be okay, man,” he says, and Izuku watches Kacchan snort from across the table.

“I’ll blow your head clear off your shoulders if you give up now, Sparky,” he growls, slamming a hand down in front of Kaminari’s head where it’s pressed to the wooden surface.

“Does it really count as putting him out of his misery if it’s such a painful way to go?” Uraraka wonders from beside Izuku. He glances over to her, surprised to see that she’s looked up from her own notes to watch the argument.

“I would imagine being blown up by Bakugou would be one of the worst ways,” Iida muses, and Izuku blinks. Tsuyu nods from next to him.

“They say burning to death is the worst way, ribbit,” she mutters, nodding. “Explosions would be about the same.”

“Yeah, Baku!” Kaminari whines, pulling his head up only to rest it on his arms, still leaned forward

on the table. “If you’re gonna kill me, you gotta do it quick and painless.”

Kacchan rolls his eyes. “Do you have any fucking requests?” he asks, voice thick with sarcasm. “I’m sure you’d be in less *pain* if you studied earlier than the week before exams.”

“Isn’t hanging the least painful?” Uraraka asks, tipping her head to the side. “I’ve heard that if you snap your neck, you’re alive for about two minutes but there’s no pain.”

Kirishima nods. “Yeah, I’ve heard that too. I would think getting shot in the head would be about the same, though.” He grimaces. “Not a very manly way to go, though,” he says, and Izuku wonders if they’re talking about suicide or just dying those ways in general.

“I’m probably gonna die from electrocution,” Kaminari says, sitting up completely and tipping his head slightly to the side. “Like, what if someone cancels my quirk and I try to absorb a shock or something? I’d totally die.”

“You’ll probably die falling down the fucking stairs,” Kacchan mutters, and Kaminari blinks, looking affronted.

“Hey!” he protests. “I heard that!” Kacchan arches an eyebrow.

“Yeah, you were fucking meant to,” he answers. “Electrocution would fucking hurt,” he says, eyes narrowing. “It makes your muscles go fucking crazy, and it stops your heart. People shit themselves when they get shocked.”

“It’s actually not that bad,” Izuku says, before he can think twice about it. “Suffocation is by far the worst, I think. Bleeding out would be my pick, I think. Your brain releases a bunch of endorphins at the end, so it actually feels really nice,” he says, the blinks when he realizes everyone’s staring at him. “O-Or so I’ve heard!” he adds quickly, holding his hands up in front of him. “I-I don’t know f-for sure, obviously!”

Kirishima gives him a weird look, one eyebrow raising slightly. “Who’d you hear it from?” he asks. “I’d think bleeding out would seriously suck, you know? You’d get all cold and stuff.”

Iida nods from next to him. “I don’t know about dying, but when I’ve been injured in the past and lost blood, it certainly was not an enjoyable experience,” he comments, his eyes moving slightly to look at Izuku.

“I-I just read it on some forum,” Izuku says, not meeting any of their eyes and instead looking at the space between Kirishima and Kaminari. “S-So it could just have been, um, made up,” he adds, and Kaminari shrugs.

“Dude, literally *any* way has to be less painful than math class,” he says, voice a groan as he flops onto the desk again. “I’m gonna *fail* .”

“Fucking study if you’re so worried about it, then,” Kacchan growls, and Izuku wants to keep watching their interactions, but he’s distracted when he notices a pair of mismatched eyes watching him. He glances over to see Todoroki staring at him from across the room, his brows furrowed slightly and a hint of a frown on his face. Izuku gives him a small, shaky smile and turns back to his notes.

cw: none

discord: <https://discord.gg/Vqaj62ceCt>

i hope you enjoyed!!! ill get to comments soon-ish i promise, im a little behind on homework rn rip

next up is the final exam arc, which should take about 2-3 chapters and then it's the summer training camp! this story is divided into three "superarcs," the first of which is from the beginning of the story up until they move into the dorms, so we're very close to the end of the first superarc! im really really excited :D

final exams, part 1

Chapter Summary

last time: ace gets told to stop being dumb by eraserhead, izuku buys some knives from miura who is injured, and then he talks about the best ways to die!

Chapter Notes

HHHHH this chapter was hard to write at first and then?? it ended up being a BLAST to write in certain parts which i live for

i hope u enjoy!!!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

On the last day of final exams, Izuku already wants to die by the time lunch ends, and he hasn't even taken the practical exam yet. It's probably because the hero ethics test was right *before* lunch, and out of all of the written tests, it's the one Izuku has been most worried for. It's the class Aizawa teaches, and Izuku is almost certain at this point that Aizawa considers making students cry during exams his personal calling. Maybe. Izuku isn't sure if it's just his class, but he knows for sure that Kaminari and Hagakure cried too, so at least he's not the only one.

The test had been *hard*, going into detail and asking for so many written answers, and Izuku's hand is still sore from writing even as he walks out of the lunchroom with Uraraka, Iida, Todoroki, and Tsuyu at his sides. He's starting to wish he'd taken lunch on the roof or in Aizawa's office, but he didn't really want to face Aizawa after crying over his exam, and it's uncomfortably warm out, so the mess hall seemed like his only real option.

It's not that he doesn't love his friends, really. He likes their company most of the time, but with the way Uraraka keeps talking about the upcoming exam and the way Todoroki is definitely watching him out of the corner of his eyes, it's a little much for him right now. His eyes are still a little raw from wiping them on his sleeve so much, so when they get to the locker rooms to change for heroics, it's almost a relief to slip into a bathroom stall and finally, finally be *alone*.

Izuku probably shouldn't take a second to just stand there, heels of his palms pressed to his closed eyes, the warmth of his skin seeping into his eyelids and soothing the achy just-cried feeling, but he does. There's something calming about standing in a bathroom stall and just listening to the chatter in the rest of the locker room, just hearing his friends talking and laughing without actually being able to make out the words or having to reply, to put a face on and act like he's not about to cry just with fear about this stupid practical exam. Mirio had told him it'd be okay, that the test was fair, but the thing is, Izuku's the *first* quirkless student at UA. The test might be designed to be fair to those students with quirks they can actually use during the exam itself, but would it be fair to him? Even if he used his quirk, how was that *fair*? As much as Izuku doesn't mind dying to save others from pain, it's exhausting. He doesn't want to have to kill himself just to pass a class.

Izuku can't help it, really, when a fresh sob rises in his chest. It's a sinking feeling when he realizes

he's starting to cry again, because he doesn't really have anything to cry over. It's stupid. He hasn't even *taken* the test, and here he is, chest shaking and throat tight and his hands pressed too-tight into his eyes. He tries not to make any noise when he breathes in, but the shaky sound in his breath is too much, and he just holds his breath instead, letting the sobs die quietly in between his ribs and his collarbone. He doesn't want to be known as the crybaby Deku, like he's always been, even if that's already his reputation here too, kind of. It's different when he's crying over something as stupid as a test that he might *pass*, that might even be *easy* for him.

And it's not even like this is unfair to him, really. Sure, he might have to use his quirk, but shouldn't he be grateful to *have* a quirk? Shouldn't he just get over himself and stop whining? Izuku knows, *knows* other people's quirks hurt them, too. Aizawa's eyes are red. Todoroki's afraid of his left side. When Kacchan's quirk first came in, he'd exploded himself so many times that Izuku lost count. Uraraka's quirk makes her sick. So what does Izuku think makes him so special? Why does he think it's different, when it's him?

Izuku leans his back against the wall of the bathroom stall, and he drags his hands down his face, pulling too hard at the skin there. He stares at the floor, shadowed in the dim light, and he realizes he's dropped his costume on the floor. His face feels wet, even with his hands now resting on his cheeks instead of his eyes, and he feels dizzy. *Probably because I'm still holding my breath*, he thinks, and he snorts out a quiet laugh that quickly turns into a sob that's too loud, far too loud, edging into a whimper at the end. Izuku moves his right hand to put the crook of his forefinger and thumb into his mouth, biting down on it, hard. He tastes something salty, maybe tears or sweat or blood. Someone knocks on the door of the bathroom stall, quick and sharp.

"Midoriya?" It's Ojiro's voice, surprisingly. "Are you in there?" Izuku hears whispering, outside the door. Ojiro isn't alone, but Izuku doesn't know who else is there.

"Mmhmm," Izuku hums around his hand. The meat of his hand hurts, burns. When he tightens his jaw, digs his teeth in, he's surprised that it makes it hurt less, somehow. He's breathing around it, but only a little bit, his breath wet and hot and catching in his throat every few seconds.

"Can you open the door?" Ojiro asks, and Izuku thinks he can hear concern in his voice. Izuku shakes his head, the motion stinging his hand, but then he realizes that they can't see him doing that, so he just kind of... whimpers a no, a pathetic sound that makes him cringe. The whispering outside the door picks up again.

"Midoriya," Todoroki says, and *oh, of course it's him*, "if you don't open the door, Ojiro is going to get Aizawa-sensei." From his tone of voice, Izuku can tell that Todoroki isn't fond of the idea of getting their teacher. Izuku also knows from experience that Todoroki *will* break the door down if Izuku doesn't open it, so he does, pulling his hand from his mouth and tucking it in his armpit, between his blazer and his button down, the fabric rough and uncomfortable on the swollen skin. Izuku reaches his other hand out and unlatches the stall door, watching as it swings out, then is *yanked* open. There's something desperate and relieved on Todoroki's face when he steps back, pulling the door out of the way, and Izuku is glad that it's just Todoroki and Ojiro staring back at him.

"Hey man, it's okay," Ojiro says, his brows creased in concern. "What happened?" He reaches a hand out, setting it carefully, slowly on Izuku's shoulder, tugging him out of the cramped bathroom stall and into the little hallway that connects the locker room and the bathroom stalls together. Izuku's still crying, he knows, but it seems quieter in the larger space, and even though there are tears running down his face, it's easier to speak.

"I-I'm just--" he hiccups, then swallows. "I-I'm gonna *fail*," he mumbles, squeezing his eyes shut

so that he doesn't have to see how they're going to react when they realize how pathetic he's being. He feels a sob shudder its way up his throat and he *hates* it, hates that he's crying over something so stupid when he's been through so much worse. It's because he isn't looking that when warm arms and a soft tail grab him, tugging him into a hug, he's almost surprised. He opens his eyes just to see Ojiro's costume, the plain white martial arts uniform soft against the rubbed-raw skin of his face.

"It's okay," Ojiro says, softly. "Todoroki, there was blood in his mouth," Ojiro says, quieter, over Izuku's head. "His hand." Izuku doesn't see what happens next, just staring at clean white fabric, but he feels a pair of warm hands carefully extract his hand from where he's tucked it into his clothes. There's a moment's pause, a soft finger running along the swollen, irritated skin, and then Izuku feels one of the hands go cold, just a step warmer than ice, and he sighs in relief as it numbs the pain he hadn't even noticed.

"He bit it," Todoroki murmurs, and Izuku nods into Ojiro's shirt.

"Sorry," he mumbles, and Ojiro gives him a gentle squeeze.

"It's okay man, we're all stressed out with the exams. It's okay to be upset," Ojiro says, voice gentle. "You really shouldn't bite yourself, though. You've got some serious biting power."

Izuku huffs out a shaky laugh. "Comes with practice," he murmurs, and Ojiro snorts, patting him gently on the head. Izuku pulls back, wiping the tears away from his face with his sleeve, and Ojiro releases him, letting him pull back. Todoroki's grip on his hand tightens when Izuku tries to tug it back, though, and Izuku glances over to see Todoroki staring down at the wound, his eyes narrowed and his face thoughtful. Izuku can see the wound, too, and it's really not that bad, just red and puffy and swollen with the indents of Izuku's teeth. It looks like he'd broken the skin where his canine teeth dug into the flesh, but not anywhere else. There's a thin layer of mist around the wound, where Todoroki's right hand must be cooling it. Izuku looks over to Todoroki, smiles at him.

"Sorry, Todoroki," he says, and Todoroki looks up at him, brows creased slightly. "I'm okay now, really. I was just freaking out a little." His smile feels shaky, and Todoroki nods, slowly, his eyes dropping back down to the bite mark.

"Do the teachers know you get testing anxiety?" Ojiro asks, his eyes on the bite mark, on the hand that Todoroki is still holding.

"I-I don't," Izuku says, and he doesn't have to look up at Ojiro's face to know he's raising an eyebrow.

"Right," Ojiro says, "you should tell them, sometime. It's kind of their job to help with that kind of thing." He says it so confidently, like that's just how it goes. Like teachers have helped him with that kind of thing. Like they'd help Izuku with that kind of thing. Izuku doesn't want to fight, though, doesn't want to explain to Ojiro that when you're quirkless, teachers *don't* help, so he just nods. Ojiro takes a step back, and Izuku turns to Todoroki again.

"C-Can I have my hand back?" he asks, tentatively, and Todoroki's gaze snaps up to him before he drops Izuku's hand, red tinting slightly red. Todoroki stares for a moment, mismatched eyes looking at Izuku, then he frowns, just slightly.

"You don't need to hide when you're upset," Todoroki says. "You have friends who care about you. We want to help." His gaze flickers meaningfully to the bathroom stall behind Izuku. "Things feel worse when you're alone," he says, and *oh*, Izuku thinks he might be talking about himself a

little bit, too, but Izuku's not going to say that right now.

"It's embarrassing, though," Izuku mumbles, looking at his hand, at the red indents in the swollen skin. "We're all taking the same exams, but I'm the only one crying in the bathroom about it."

Ojiro snorts. "Dude, Kaminari was crying in the locker room like, five minutes ago. You're definitely not the only one who's upset about it." He sighs, a soft smile on his face. "Plus, it wouldn't matter even if you were. I'm sure everyone would rather know about it then have you do that to yourself," he waves at Izuku's hand, and Izuku nods, looking down at the floor and flushing red.

"R-Right," he murmurs. "I, um. I still have to change," he says, quietly.

"You have time," Todoroki says. "I'll wait for you." He smiles at Izuku, a faint, gentle sort of smile, and Izuku smiles back, nodding.

"Okay," he says. "Thank you. Both of you," he says, glancing at Ojiro, who just shrugs and rubs at the back of his neck.

"It's really not a problem," he says, glancing to the side. "It's what friends are for, right?" Izuku nods, his smile growing wider, and he ducks back into the bathroom stall.

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"You'll be put in pairs," Aizawa says, voice sounding low and bored. He's standing in front of them, a packet of paper held in his hands. "And each pair will face off against one of the teachers." He looks up at the group, his eyes glancing over each student. Izuku swallows when their eyes meet, for just a second.

"You'll all be going at the same time so that we don't end up going all day, but you'll be able to watch footage of the others' matches after, if you want," Aizawa mumbles, flipping the page over. "You pass if you get out of your assigned fighting ring or either one of you capture your assigned teacher using the capture tape that'll be provided. You're all evaluated individually, so if your partner is the only reason you capture the teacher or escape, you'll still fail," he looks up over the paper. "Any questions before I tell you your groups?" The class buzzes with murmurs, but only Iida raises his hand. Aizawa nods to him.

"Sir, if we fail the exam, we're not allowed to go on the summer training camp trip, correct?" Iida asks, waving his hands as he speaks. Aizawa nods.

"Correct. Those who fail the exam will not be allowed to go on the camping trip with the rest of you." He glances over the group. "Any other questions?" He waits, but not for long. Izuku glances around, but nobody raises their hands.

"Yaoyorozu and Todoroki," Aizawa says, and Izuku feels Todoroki stiffen where he's standing next to him. "You two will be fighting me. Ojiro and Asui, you'll be against All Might. Bakugou and Tokoyami, Ectoplasm. Midoriya and Kaminari, Nezu," Aizawa keeps talking, keeps reading off names, but Izuku doesn't pay attention, twisting his torso to look around at Kaminari, who's leaned back and staring at Izuku. When their eyes meet, Kaminari gives him a thumbs up and a smile, but he looks nervous. Izuku isn't much better, but he gives Kaminari a shaky smile in return, anyway.

"That's everyone," Aizawa says, sighing and lowering the paper. "If you go outside, your assigned teacher will be waiting in front of the area that's been prepared for you to use. Yaoyorozu and

Todoroki, you can just follow me.” He turns on his heels, walking toward the door, and Izuku blinks as the class starts to move, starts to filter out the door and into the bright sunlight outside. Izuku stays behind.

“Hey man,” Kaminari says, stepping over to stand at Izuku’s side. “Nezu, huh?” He chuckles nervously.

“Y-Yeah,” Izuku replies, swallowing. “I-I’m sorry,” he adds, almost an afterthought. Kaminari frowns, tilting his head slightly to the side.

“Wait, what for?” Kaminari asks, squinting slightly.

Izuku shrugs, looks at the ground. “You got paired with the quirkless guy,” he says. His sneakers are a bright, bright red against the ground. “Sorry.”

“What?” Kaminari’s startled laugh surprises Izuku, and he glances up to see Kaminari with a confused smile on his face and one eyebrow raised. “Dude, you’re like, one of the smartest people in the class. That’s gonna be way more help than a quirk would be when we’re up against the principal, right?” Kaminari gives him a thumbs up, tipping his head to the side and grinning. “We’ve got this, Midoriya.”

Izuku presses his own lips into a shaky smile. “Right!” He nods, and Kaminari returns the motion before stepping forward, out into the sunlight. Izuku follows him, his legs shaking ever so slightly in his costume pants. The light is bright, almost blinding, but his vision clears after a few seconds, his eyes adjusting to the change in light. He follows Kaminari, even though he can see Nezu where the small man (animal? Man? Izuku doesn’t know which to think of him as) is standing with his hands folded behind him, in front of a fenced off area that Izuku’s never seen before. *They must have built little arenas just for the exam*, he realizes.

It’s a cityscape of some kind, with buildings that are tall and neat and *climbable*, the kind of thing that Izuku is used to, but between the buildings, further in, he thinks he can see what looks like a construction site, with I-beams and a bulldozer and a couple of other machines. Izuku’s not sure he likes the idea of their principal in one of those, but, well, he supposes he doesn’t have much of a choice, does he?

“Hello, boys,” Nezu says as they approach, his lips quirking up into a smile. He’s shorter than them, and Izuku can’t help but feel a little awkward as he looks down at the principal.

“H-Hello, sensei,” Izuku replies. Kaminari nods beside him.

“Hi!” he says, sounding at least as nervous as Izuku is. “So, uh, we’re in there?” Kaminari points to the arena behind Nezu, and the principal nods.

“Mhmm!” he hums, turning and walking into the arena. “I’m the one who requested you two be paired up against me, you know,” he says, voice pleasant and light. “I thought it’d be interesting, since you, Kaminari, are at the bottom of the class and you’re quirkless, Midoriya. If I’d been born human, there’s a good chance I’d have been assumed to just be quirkless and above average intelligence, you know? So it’ll be a battle of intelligence versus quirk power.” He looks back over his shoulder, his dark eyes narrowed. “I’m quite excited for the chance to play the villain in this little exercise, I must admit.” Izuku can’t help the shiver that runs up his spine, cold and dark.

“H-Hey, Midoriya?” Kaminari nudges him with an elbow. “Is it just me, or is this guy actually really scary?” Izuku nods and swallows. *He’s right, though. His quirk just makes him smarter than average, but it doesn’t give him any exceptional powers. I’m not that intelligent, but I don’t think*

I'm stupid, necessarily, and Kaminari ... Izuku decides to reserve judgement on his classmate's intelligence until they've started. Izuku remembers him being pretty useful during the USJ attack, so he doesn't think he'll be too bad. Grades don't indicate intelligence; Izuku knows that.

"Alright then, boys," Nezu says as they step into the mock construction site. "You've been briefed on the terms of this exercise, I assume? Escape or capture me and you win, get knocked out or run out of time and you lose. It's fairly simple, really." Nezu steps up onto a step that leads to the seat of what looks like a bulldozer, the machine's bright orange paint flaked and chipped around the large scoop on its front, exposing silver-grey metal. Izuku doesn't like the look of it, not at all.

"I'll give you to the count of ten," Nezu says, his eyes narrowing. He reaches into his pocket and then up to his face, sliding a microphone onto his face, complete with an earpiece. "This'll make it easier for you to hear me. One," he starts counting and Izuku startles, grabbing Kaminari by his elbow and pulling him out of sight quickly, jogging and leading him behind the nearest building.

"Oh my god," Kaminari whispers. "We're going to die," he says just as Izuku hears a loud crash from the other side of the building. "It hasn't even been ten seconds!" Kaminari whimpers, and Izuku bites at his lower lip.

"Okay," Izuku murmurs. "Your quirk is best suited to close range combat so you can shock someone without frying yourself, right?" Kaminari nods, blinking. "That's probably why Nezu chose this set up," Izuku mumbles, bringing a hand to his chin. "You could almost disable the bulldozer by shocking it, but I bet you would end up overusing your quirk. I think our best bet has to be escaping, then."

Kaminari nods quickly. "Whatever you think is best, man!" He shrugs, eyes wide. "I have no freakin' idea how I would do this without you! I woulda just charged in and hoped for the best." Izuku bites his lip, because the image of Kaminari shocking the entire clearing makes him anxious even if it's not happening.

"Can you climb buildings?" Izuku asks. "If we jump from roof to roof, it'll be hard for Nezu to get us with that bulldozer. It would take him more time to knock buildings over than it would to just drive after us." Kaminari gives him an incredulous look.

"Are you kidding? I can't climb buildings, I--" Kaminari says, but he's cut off by the sounds of tires crunching on loose gravel, and Izuku glances up to see Nezu turning the corner in a frankly terrifying construction vehicle, that massive bulldozer he'd crawled into earlier. Izuku curses under his breath.

"Okay, here's the plan," he says, tugging Kaminari after him as he starts to move away from the bulldozer. "We're just going to run!"

"That's it?!" Kaminari cries, running after Izuku. "He's in a car, dude! He's faster than us!"

"Do you have a better idea?" Izuku shouts back at him. He spots a building in front of him, mostly smooth concrete and stone, but this one at least has a fire escape on it. "Copy my moves," he says and launches himself onto the first floor fire escape, his fingers stinging as they dig into the metal and he hauls himself up. He starts to run up the stairs, but he doesn't hear any step following after him, and when he reaches the second story of the fire escape and looks down, he sees Kaminari still on the ground, fumbling with the locked gate leading to the stairs onto the ground. Izuku bites his lip, hissing.

"Kaminari, climb the gate!" he shouts. "It's just like a chain link fence! It'll hold your weight," he calls, and Kaminari looks up at him with wide eyes. He's only frozen for a moment, but he's facing

away from the street they'd just run down, so Izuku's the only one who can see Nezu barrelling down the street, straight for them. Izuku shakes his head and braces himself, throwing himself from the second story fire escape and landing crouched on the ground without a second thought. He's on his feet in another heartbeat, grabbing onto the back of Kaminari's costume jacket and yanking him out of the way of the bulldozer just as it rams into the fire escape entrance, crushing and bending the metal right where Kaminari had been moments before.

"Holy shit," Kaminari breathes, eyes wide. "You just--" Izuku cuts him off.

"There's no time," he snaps, pulling Kaminari as he starts to run toward the exit. "We have to get some distance between him and us," Izuku says, and as he glances over his shoulder, he can see Nezu back out of the fire escape and turn his bulldozer back towards the two students, an evil gleam in his beady eyes.

"Kaminari, Midoriya," Nezu says, his voice sing-song and light. "I'm disappointed, you know. Can't you come up with anything more creative?"

"Like what?" Izuku mutters under his breath as he yanks Kaminari into an alleyway.

"We could try and ambush him?" Kaminari says, whispering. "If I touch his bulldozer and go off, the shock should travel to him, too, right?"

Izuku bites his lip. "Maybe. It's risky. If it doesn't work, there's a good chance you'll become dead weight."

"But even if it doesn't knock him out, it'll shut down his bulldozer," Kaminari says. "It's worth a shot," he says, meeting Izuku's eyes with a serious look on his face.

"If it doesn't work, I'll just try again," Izuku murmurs, and he ignores when Kaminari opens his mouth, probably to ask about that. "Fine. I'll draw him out, and you grab onto something metal and discharge, okay? You shouldn't need your full power. It's the amperage that knocks people out, not the voltage. Metal is relatively low resistance, so it should be okay with half."

"Wow dude, you're seriously smart," Kaminari says. "Okay. Will you give me a signal when it's time?"

Izuku grimaces. "I'll let you know," he says. "You ready?" he asks, and Kaminari nods, his head bobbing up and down. Izuku takes a deep breath, steadying himself, and he runs out of the alleyway, hands clenched into fists and pumping at his sides as he runs.

He doesn't have to look to see Nezu's approach, but he does anyway, his vision focusing on the bulldozer as it fast approaches him. Izuku braces, crouching down slightly as Nezu drives towards him, then at the last second he jumps, dodging the sharp bottom edge of the scoop as it pushes forward at him. Instead of being knocked over by it, he lands in the scoop itself, and Nezu's cackling plays over the intercom as the scoop rises, bringing Izuku higher and higher into the air. *It's now or never*, Izuku thinks as it reaches its highest point, and Izuku leaps from the scoop, pulling his knives from his hidden compartments in his arm guards. He hisses at the shock of the impact when he crashes into the side of the nearest building, his knives digging into the concrete just enough to hold him.

"Now, Kaminari!" he shouts, unable to turn around to see what happens. He hears a large buzzing noise along with a *bang* that makes him itch to turn and look, but he's more concerned with not falling. It's a close call, but the knives he's holding in each hand support him just long enough for him to swing his legs into one of the windows on the faux building. Thankfully, none of the

windows seem to have actual glass in them, and it's easy enough for Izuku to pull his entire body into the building and turn around, frantically assessing the scene in front of him.

"Oh, oops!" Nezu says, and Izuku's heart sinks in his chest. He sees Kaminari, limp and quiet on the ground beside the bulldozer, which looks to still be fully operational. Nezu has something in his hands, and it takes Izuku a moment to process that the principal is holding a *gun*, a pistol. Izuku blinks.

"What, did you think you'd be the only one given weapons? Don't make me laugh!" Nezu giggles. "It's just a rubber bullet, don't look so concerned. Although, I do think Kaminari used his quirk a little too much when I hit him. Poor thing." Nezu does not sound sorry at all. In fact, Izuku thinks he's having a little too much fun.

"Does that mean I'm allowed to throw knives at you?" Izuku calls back in response, and Nezu laughs, throwing his head back and grabbing the controls of the bulldozer with one hand, the handgun in his other. The bulldozer lurches forward, the motor growling, and Izuku grits his teeth, leaping back from the window just as the vehicle slams into the wall, crushing it to dust and widening the window into a gaping hole in the structure.

"Sure, but I doubt you'll hit," Nezu replies, and Izuku knows better to stick around. He turns and starts to run, his hands still gripping his knives. He hates the way he hears the gunshot before he feels the rubber bullet hit his calf, a bloom of pain that makes him wince and sends him to his knees on the floor of the building. His knives clatter across the floor, loud and echoing in the concrete building. Izuku hisses, whipping around, his movements slowed by the pain in his leg. He sees Nezu step out of the bulldozer, sees him crawl neatly on all fours from the cabin of the machine and across its windshield and scoop into the hole he'd made in the wall.

"Fuck," Izuku swears under his breath, suddenly really understanding why Kacchan likes to curse so much as he launches himself out of the window on the opposite side of the building from Nezu. It's not a smart move, not with the fact that he's definitely on the third floor of this building, but he manages to land in a sloppy roll that contains the damage from the fall to just his right shoulder, which cracks painfully. Izuku lurches to his feet and *runs*, grabbing at his shoulder with his left hand. *Dislocated*, his brain supplies, and then he hears another gunshot. This bullet hits him in the center of his back, and he falls face first into the ground, the loose gravel scraping against his cheek. Izuku starts to struggle to his feet, but Nezu stops him.

"Stay down, Midoriya," he says, his tone firm but not unkind. "It's over. You're a little too injured for me to be comfortable continuing this, and in any case, I think it's clear that you two have failed." He sighs, and Izuku turns over onto his back, propping himself with his good arm, and he sees the principal standing in the window of the building Izuku'd just jumped out of, a smoking gun in his hand.

"We failed?" Izuku mumbles, his mouth feeling like it's full of marbles. "That's it? We failed?"

Nezu sighs. "Yes, well, the point of these exams is less to actually have you beat the requirements and 'win' and more to see you overcome a shortcoming of yours, you see? For Kaminari, that would be to use his head and not just rely on his powerful but poorly controlled quirk to win. For you, on the other hand..." Nezu smiles. "As useful as fighting dirty and doing whatever it takes to win is, I'm certainly not the only teacher to notice that you often get injured in the process. All of the training and all of the smarts in the world won't stop you from dying in the field if your first instinct is always to put yourself in danger." He fiddles with the handgun, flipping the safety on before stashing it in a concealed holster, hidden under his suit jacket. "Take when you were on the fire escape, for example. If you had time to jump down and move him, surely you also had time to

simply *tell* Kaminari to move?"

"But, I--" Izuku starts but Nezu cuts him off with a wave of his paw.

"No buts!" he says, chuckling. "You're a smart boy, Midoriya. But you don't trust others, and more importantly, you don't trust your own skills. Next time you have to do an exercise like this, keep that in mind."

"R-Right," Izuku says, feeling distant. "Next time."

"Indeed!" Nezu says, chuckling. "Well then, why don't you head on over to Recovery Girl and get that shoulder checked, hmm? I'll gather up Kaminari and catch up with you. You look like you're in pain!" Izuku nods, dully. He pulls himself to his feet, staring at the ground, at the gravel there. He wonders how he should kill himself.

He walks out of the ring, not looking back, not listening. His shoulder and calf ache with every step, and he can feel his pulse pounding in his arm, the swelling already building up in his dislocated shoulder making the whole limb feel heavy and hot. Izuku steps out of the arena area, away from the other students who have finished. He hears someone call his name, but he doesn't answer. He walks, slow even steps, until he's in the hallway of the building, until he's in the locker room. It's empty. Quiet.

Izuku goes to one of the showers, since there's a drain in it. He sits on the floor, even though there's water on the white tile, cool and still. It soaks into the bottom of his costume, mixing with the concrete dust there and making a thing, pale mud. Izuku rolls up his sleeves. He stares at his arms, at the scars and cuts near his elbows, at the smooth, tanned skin between his cuts and his wrists. He wonders if he could cut lower down, now that he's always wearing long sleeves anyways. *Maybe not. This way, I can roll my sleeves up at least a bit .*

He draws a knife from his belt sheath, a normal one and not one of the throwing ones. The throwing knives the support department gave him aren't even part of his costume, yet. Aizawa doesn't know he's Ace, doesn't know he uses them at night, so he doesn't know how good Izuku's gotten with them. Izuku wonders if, if he tried hard enough, he could slice clear through his arm, between the two bones of his forearm. He presses the blade to his right wrist and tries his best.

The blood rushes out quickly, so quickly, and the pain is grounding. Normally, Izuku'd slash both wrists, but he doesn't think his right arm is strong enough to hold the blade, not between the deep gash in it and the dislocated shoulder. Instead, he holds the blade in his left hand and stretches his legs out in front of him, digging the knife into the space where his leg joins to his body, where he knows the femoral artery to be. He doesn't think he gets it, not with the way the blood doesn't pump, doesn't rush out like it is from his wrist, but he's definitely gotten down to muscle at least. Maybe he'll get to the artery if he keeps digging, keeps slashing the inside of the wound. Blood sprays up from it when he hits *something* , and Izuku watches it spatter along the inside of the tiled wall with blurry vision.

He doesn't have long left, he knows, so he lets the knife drop to the ground with a clatter. He wishes he'd turned the shower on, because he can hear the exact second when someone else steps into the locker room, and he *knows* they can smell the blood, can hear him gasping for breath. It doesn't matter, because he can already see black edging his vision, but he hates the idea that someone might have to see again. The curtain blocking the shower is pushed open, and Izuku tilts his head up to see Todoroki, because of *course* it's Todoroki, mismatched eyes wide. Izuku smiles at him as he loses consciousness, everything fading into a swirl of black and white and red.

Chapter End Notes

cw: self harm, graphic suicide, guns

discord: discord: <https://discord.gg/Vqaj62ceCt>

also i may be sharing some SUPER cool art from someone in the server soon!!!! it's amazing frankly im so hyped!

tysm as always for all of the super nice comments!!! they really do make my day <3

final exams, part 2

Chapter Summary

last time: izuku starts the final exam with him and kaminari v nezu, then he kmses violently and todoroki sees AGAIN

Chapter Notes

this chapter is shorter than usual AND it sucks like damn pick a struggle?? anyway i hope u enjoy my high definition torturing of our little green bean

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Izuku opens his eyes to that construction site, to that brightly lit clearing with Nezu in front of him, a sly smile on his face. He's on the first step up to that bulldozer from before, the shiny silver stairs leading to the cabin glimmering in the sun. His paw is up by his ear, and Izuku knows what he's about to say even as he starts to say it.

"This'll make it easier for you to hear me," Nezu says, then starts counting. Izuku doesn't hesitate, doesn't wait to run forward, unsheathing both of the knives on his belt and rushes at the wheels of the bulldozer.

"Kaminari!" Izuku shouts as he buries a knife in the closest tire. "We need to disable the vehicles, then disarm him. There's no way he doesn't have a weapon," he says, and when Kaminari jogs up to him, Izuku passes him a knife, hilt first. He yanks his own knife up out of the tire, air rushing out of the gash in the thick black material. It smells like rubber, like coal and tar and something chemical-sharp, but Izuku doesn't hesitate, running to the next wheel as Kaminari nods, taking the knife Izuku'd given him and going around to the other side of the bulldozer. Izuku hears Nezu giggling above them as he counts.

"Five," he calls out, and Izuku glances up to see the man settling into the seat of the bulldozer. Izuku wonders, briefly, why he'd sit in the bulldozer even with them disabling the wheels. Izuku stabs his knife into the next wheel, hearing the satisfying hiss of air as it pops and he yanks the knife out, turning to face Nezu.

"Eight," Nezu says, reaching his hand into his coat. Izuku grimaces and whips around, running to Kaminari and grabbing the boy's shoulder, pulling him away from the bulldozer.

"He's got a gun," Izuku breathes, leading them out of the clearing and behind the nearest building. "He won't have real bullets, so we might be able to tank a couple of hits, but we can't let him guide this battle. We have to disarm him, and *fast*."

"How do you know he's got a gun?" Kaminari asks, brows furrowed. " *Why* would he have a gun? We're, like, children!" Kaminari shakes his head, frowning.

"It just makes sense," Izuku says. "Here's what we're going to do. I'll distract him. You sneak up

from behind and shock him, okay?” Kaminari stares at him incredulously, his left eye twitching.

“How on earth am I going to sneak up on him?” Kaminari asks. “He’s like, a dog, right? Doesn’t he have super good hearing?”

“I think he’s actually a rat,” Izuku answers, distractedly. “I’ll try to keep his attention, but make sure you don’t make yourself go stupid if he shoots you. Getting shot is startling.”

“Interesting,” Nezu’s voice startles Izuku, and he jumps back instinctively, Kaminari doing the same next to him. “You seem to know exactly what’s happening, Midoriya.” Izuku clenches his jaw as he steps back, putting himself between Kaminari and Nezu, holding his knives up in front of him.

“Kaminari,” Izuku hisses, and Kaminari squeaks behind him. “The plan.” He jerks his head to the side, hoping that Kaminari gets the idea. He hears footsteps behind him, quick and light, so he thinks he did. Izuku gets into a fighting stance, gritting his teeth, and he ducks forward just as Nezu raises his arm, pointing the pistol at Izuku. Izuku strikes out at his paw with the blade of his knife, his wrist twisting and slicing into Nezu’s arm. The gun clatters to the floor, but Nezu seems unfazed.

“You knew I had a gun, didn’t you, Midoriya? And you knew I only had rubber bullets, hmm?” He takes a step forward, holding out his arm and examining the cut there. Bright red blood drips from the wound, staining his white fur a dark red.

Izuku hisses and darts forward, moving to strike out with one knee. Nezu hums, dodging the strike easily, with a step to the side. He doesn’t even blink.

“You know, I’ve thought there was something strange about you from the beginning, Midoriya. This has really helped me put it all together, though.” Nezu grins, teeth sharp and bright white in his mouth. “So, what is it, then? Can you see the future? Or are you reading my mind? Oh, or is it an analysis quirk, like mine?” He chuckles, his eyes dark. “It’s impressive that you’ve managed to keep it hidden so long, really. But did you think you’d be able to get away with being quite so obvious?”

Izuku swallows, shaking his head. “I-I don’t--I don’t have a-anything, I-I-like that, sir. I--” His breath catches in his throat as Nezu raises an eyebrow, a little smile still on his lips.

“Don’t you, though?” Nezu asks, tipping his head slightly to the side. “I’m honestly a little embarrassed that it took me until now to notice that you had a quirk all along, Midoriya.” Izuku bites his lip, but steps back, seeing a flash of blonde hair behind the principal. Izuku watches as Kaminari grins, setting both of his hands on the principal’s shoulders. His quirk ripples up, a wave of bright, crackling gold that Izuku has to squint against, the light burning his eyes.

Izuku steps back, eyes still wide as the principal drops to the ground, his fur poofing up with static and a few wayward sparks popping off of his body. Izuku’s just frozen there, his arms shaking at his sides as Kaminari crouches down, deftly wrapping the white capture tape around the principal’s little wrists and glancing up at Izuku, grinning brightly.

“We did it, dude!” He gives Izuku a thumbs up. “Now I guess we just wait until he wakes up?” He glances down at the principal and chuckles nervously. “I, uh, I might have overdone it a little.” The principal groans from the ground, opening one dark eye and smiling slightly.

“Good job, boys! You both pass.” He coughs, looking a little embarrassed. “Now, could you untie me? I’d like to fix this situation with my fur,” he says, glancing down at himself. Izuku would

laugh at it, at the way he's puffed up to twice his normal fluffiness, but it all feels very far away, very distant from him somehow. Izuku watches as Kaminari nods, undoing the capture tape he'd just put on the principal. Izuku swallows.

"Sensei, may I be excused?" Izuku asks, ignoring the way Kaminari glances up at him, a confused look on his face. "I'm not feeling well." Nezu hums, looking at Izuku as he gets to his feet, brushing at his fur to smooth it down.

"What are you going to do if I let you go, hmm? Run away, I would think." Nezu meets his eyes, smiling eerily. "It's strange for a UA student to *pretend* to be quirkless, don't you think, Kaminari?" Kaminari jolts behind the principal, his eyes flicking quickly from Izuku to Nezu and back. "It makes me wonder what exactly your motivations are, Midoriya." Nezu steps forward. "I read the report from when you were interrogated. Strange how you worded some of those answers, isn't it?"

Izuku swallows, takes a deep breath. "If you think I'm a villain," he says, voice more calm than he feels, "kill me right here, then."

Nezu's eyes narrow. "Interesting," he says. "Don't want to be questioned?" Izuku sees the horror, the disbelief on Kaminari's face beside the principal. Izuku thinks he'd feel the same, if their places were swapped. Right now, Izuku doesn't feel much of anything. It feels like a dream, like imagination.

"You can try and stop me if you're really that suspicious," Izuku says, turning. "I'm going to go throw up in the bathroom." He starts walking, turning his back to Nezu and Kaminari. "I won't leave UA campus. That's enough for you, right Nezu-sensei?"

"For now!" Nezu chirps in response. "I'm sure you're smart enough to know you won't be able to escape the school property," he says, and Izuku nods, not turning around to look.

The walk down the hallway feels like a dream, like a nightmare. Izuku can hear too much, feel too little. His breath is harsh and loud in his throat as he turns to the stairs, taking them two at a time in the hopes of feeling a burn in his muscles, but even that isn't enough. He feels like he's suffocating on the inside, but he can't even make his face twitch as he stops in front of the door to the roof, reaching out to test the handle. This building is tall enough, certainly, and Izuku doesn't really want to see anyone right now, not with the way Kaminari had looked at him. Betrayed. Hurt. *Is that how they'd feel if they knew the truth for real? If I told them what I'd done?*

Izuku opens the door, the wind rushing in from the roof and hiding the soft click that he knows would normally be there as he shuts the door behind him. The roof is lonely, quiet except for the wind. Izuku dives off headfirst, just to be sure.

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When Izuku opens his eyes again, when he wakes up beside Kaminari with Nezu grinning at him, he doesn't feel much of anything. He just feels tired, even as he hears the words he knows will come.

"This will make it easier for you to hear me," Nezu says, just like before. "One," he says, and Izuku doesn't say anything to Kaminari, doesn't bother trying to speak. He turns and runs into the nearest building, ignoring the shouts from behind him.

He sits there, even when Nezu barrels through the building, almost hitting him with the scoop of his bulldozer. He sits there, limp and unthinking, unfeeling, until the test is over. He's not even sure

if Kaminari passed or failed. He's not sure of anything. His mind is grey and fuzzy and distant, and the only thing he can really hear is the sound of blood rushing in his ears. Nezu tells him to see Recovery Girl, asks if he hit his head. Izuku doesn't know how he replies, doesn't know what he says, but suddenly he's in the shower stall again, with his knife buried in his forearm, and he can *breathe* again.

The world crystallizes around him in pieces, coming back in bright colors and quiet sounds. Izuku can feel the burn of pain in his arms like a flame as he drags the knife through his forearms again, deepening the already fatal cuts there. He sees the blood, cherry bright and glossy in the fluorescent lighting. He smells his blood mixing with the scent of soap in the showers, the clean smell tainted with rust and damp. Izuku feels the tiles, cold and wet underneath him. His blood feels boiling hot as it spills onto his lap, soaking his costume pants. He tips his head back, the back of his skull knocking against the wall, and the only thing he has time to think before he dies is that really, he's just pathetic.

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When he opens his eyes the next time, it's with a bitter sense of clarity that he hadn't had before. The clearing is bright and sunny, and Izuku can only barely remember the last reset, but he knows what to do this time. He has a *plan*.

"Kaminari," he says, turning to his classmate with a determined grin on his face, cutting Nezu off before he can even explain the earpiece. "Let's not waste any time. Come with me, we're going to get some I-beams." Kaminari blinks, then grins, nodding.

"I dunno what for, but I'm game!" Kaminari says, and Izuku turns, jogging over to the pile of I-beams. He's praying that they're not so long that they can't move them, and thankfully, when he gets over and grabs onto one, he finds that he can pull it if not lift it entirely. The metal digs into his fingers, but he starts tugging it anyway, dragging it against the gravel on the ground and pulling it off of the pile and laying it down a short distance away. Across the clearing, Nezu starts counting up, watching them from his perch on the bulldozer.

"Line them up," Izuku says to Kaminari as the other boy starts tugging his own beam through the gravel, the metal making a loud, bright noise. "We're going to make you one giant circuit." He grins at Kaminari, and Kaminari blinks before nodding and dragging his beam to line its end up with the one Izuku'd set down.

"Do you think we have time for this?" Kaminari asks, running over and pulling another beam from the stack. "I mean, it's definitely been ten seconds," he says, jerking his head to the side at where Nezu is grinning evilly and turning the bulldozer around to face them. Izuku grabs his next beam, pulling it to the opposite side of where Kaminari is moving his.

"We don't need much time," Izuku says. "We just need him to get close, then I'll slash his tires and pin him down for a minute. The more of these we have, the wider your effective range without frying your brain is, right? Even if we don't complete the circuit, it should work." Izuku pauses, biting at his lower lip. "Well, I think. It's been a while since I've had physics," he says, laughing nervously, but Kaminari just grins, his head bobbing as he drags the next beam into place. Izuku sets his own down and rushes back to the stack.

"I hope this works!" Kaminari says. "It'd be so cool to get to use my quirk like that." Izuku sees a bead of sweat run down Kaminari's head just as the bulldozer lurches forward at them, and Izuku drops his I-beam, sending its end clattering to the ground as he dodges the scoop suddenly swinging at him. He curses, sliding back in a crouch, unable to see if Kaminari made it out of the way.

“Kaminari!” he calls, drawing one of his knives and darting forward, ignoring Nezu and aiming for the wheels. *If I don’t act surprised by the gun, I’m in for a rough time. I can just ignore it for now* . He digs a knife into the rubber of the tire, the hiss that rushes out of it satisfying and sharp in his ears.

“I’m good!” Kaminari shouts from the other side of the bulldozer, and Izuku sighs in relief just as he hears the loud bang that means Nezu’s finally drawn his pistol. Izuku doesn’t have to fake the way he startles, jumping back as the bullet hits the ground about two feet away from him, and he clenches his teeth. *He missed on purpose* , Izuku thinks to himself. *They really are just trying to get us to meet certain objectives. If Nezu wanted to win this, he’d have aimed for my neck.*

“Midoriya! What was that?!” Kaminari shouts, nerves in his voice, and Izuku feels his hair start to stand on end. He grits his teeth together.

“Sensei’s got a gun!” he shouts back, running forward to stab the next tire. “I don’t think they’d use real bullets on us, though, but be careful either way! Don’t use your indiscriminate shot,” he calls, hoping it’s enough.

“Okay!” Kaminari replies, and judging from the way Izuku doesn’t see any electricity, he thinks it’s probably okay. Izuku goes to shove his knife into the tire in front of him, but suddenly, the bulldozer is moving again, the flat tire he’d cut earlier making a horrible grating noise as the metal rim of it drags against the gravel. Izuku jumps back just in time to avoid the tire crushing him, running along the back of the bulldozer as it shifts and turns in place, pivoting on the damaged wheel.

“Getting clever, huh boys?” Nezu chuckles. “I like it! I’m not going to make it easy for you, though.” He cackles then, laughing maniacally like a villain. Izuku bites at his lip, running to where Kaminari is standing by the line of I-beams they’d set up, a nervous set to his face.

“Okay, new plan,” Izuku says. “He’s not going to give us a chance to use the I-beams, not with the gun. I’ll cover you, *run* . Don’t worry about me--I’ll get away, I swear.”

Kaminari looks doubtful. “Are you sure, man? I mean, he’s like a genius, wouldn’t he expect--” he’s cut off by the sharp sound of a gunshot, and Izuku’s throwing himself in front of Kaminari before he can think, grunting in pain as the bullet strikes him in the back, between two of his ribs on his left side. The pain is worse than he’d remembered, and Izuku drops to a knee, his eyes open wide and watering up as he gasps for breath.

“Midoriya!” Kaminari shouts, but Izuku shakes his head, standing back up, swaying on his feet.

“I’m fine,” he says, tightening his grip on his knife and turning to face Nezu. He rears back and twists, throwing the knife as he says to Kaminari, “Win this for me, okay?” He watches, teeth digging into his lip as the knife strikes the control panel of the bulldozer, sending a spray of sparks up that Nezu has to raise a hand to block, shielding his face from the blast. Izuku starts to run forward at the bulldozer, something uncoiling in his chest as he hears Kaminari running away behind him, the sounds of his friend’s sneakers in the gravel a comforting rhythm as Izuku launches himself into the bulldozer, gripping onto the metal and hauling himself up the side of the thing. Nezu, seemingly recovered from the explosion of the control panel, turns and points his gun at Izuku’s face. Izuku knocks his head forward, smashing his forehead into the side of the gun, hitting both the pistol itself and Nezu’s paw where it grips the handle, sending his arm to the side with a bang as the gun discharges into the space to the left of Izuku’s head.

“Whoa there,” Nezu says, blinking and taking a step back. Izuku feels something hot drip down his face and into his eyebrow and he can feel a red-hot place where the barrel of the gun must have cut

his head when he hit it. Izuku just snarls, drawing a knife and stepping forward, slashing out at Nezu's gun hand.

"Nope!" Nezu says, deftly blocking Izuku's attack with a strike to Izuku's wrist and raising the gun in one smooth motion, raising it to point at Izuku's head. Izuku jerks forward, ignoring it, and he sees Nezu's fingers move, curling away from the trigger even before the man speaks.

"Stop, Midoriya," he says, voice firm. "The test is over. You fail." Izuku freezes blinking and stepping back. Nezu sighs, shaking his head. "Even with a rubber bullet, a shot to the head like that could still be fatal, you know? And if it'd been a real fight, there's no question; you'd be dead." Nezu tilts his head to the side slightly. "I'd heard from Aizawa and All Might that you had self destructive tendencies, but I hadn't realized they had gotten quite so bad!"

Izuku blinks, swallows. "I failed?" he asks, voice soft and shaky and quiet. Nezu reaches out, pats his shoulder.

"Yes, yes, but it's not as bad as you think. Don't get so down about it, hmm? We'll have tea after this and talk about why you think it's appropriate to headbutt a handgun, but for now, shouldn't we go and see if your teammate made it out?" Nezu meets Izuku's eyes, a small smile on his face. Izuku nods, feeling distant. Nezu blinks.

"You're dissociating, aren't you?" He hums, and Izuku doesn't know what that *means*. "Interesting, interesting." His grip on Izuku's shoulder is firm but not painful as he steps forward, turning Izuku. "Do you think you can get down alright? I would help, but I'm a bit shorter than you, so I'm not sure how useful it'd be."

"I-I'm fine, sir," Izuku says, then steps down from the cabin of the bulldozer onto the stairs, the narrow stairs that he'd used in his scramble to the top of the machine. His feet make little clanking sounds on them, and he can see the bright midday sun reflecting off of the metal. He hears Nezu's steps behind him, lighter than his own.

"Now, you understand why I failed you, yes?" Nezu says from behind him, voice cheerful. "It's not because you aren't bright enough or strong enough! In fact, you should think of this as less of a failing grade and more of an order for extra lessons."

"Extra lessons?" Izuku asks, his voice mumbling slightly. He steps onto the gravel, and as soon as he's off of the bulldozer, he feels Nezu set a hand on his arm, just below the elbow. Izuku doesn't really get why, but the sensation helps to make him feel more real, more solid in the moment.

"Yes! I know you all were told that you'd be kept from the training camp if you failed, but that was more of a motivator than anything else, and it was really more for students like Kaminari than students like you." Nezu chuckles. "I mean, with you it's almost that you have a little *too* much enthusiasm! No, you'll still be allowed to go, just don't leak that to any of your classmates, okay? I think Aizawa wants to see the looks on their faces."

"Oh," Izuku says. What he doesn't say is that he'd killed himself over the exam, that he kind of feels like hurting himself over it, right now. He wonders if Nezu can feel his scabbed over cuts through his costume sleeve. He's not going to ask, that's for sure.

"You'll be getting remedial lessons, just like those who failed any written exams will have remedial lessons for those between the summer camp and the next semester. It wouldn't really make sense to train those who'd failed *less* than those who did well, would it? I personally have a few suggestions I'll be giving to Aizawa for you, namely that you should seriously consider therapy." Nezu laughs lightly as they turn around a building, the exit of the arena becoming

visible. Izuku can see Kaminari standing just outside of the gate, waving.

“Hey, Midoriya, did you win?” he shouts, a bright grin on his face. “Man, I owe you big time, I really wouldn’t have made it otherwise!” Izuku smiles at him, just grateful that Kaminari is sparing him from having to talk to Nezu any more than he’s already had to. Not that it’s really *talking*, per say. More like being talked *at*.

“I-I lost,” he says, the grin on his face turning sheepish. “I’m glad you got away, though.”

Izuku doesn’t really feel *good* necessarily, but he certainly feels better when he sees how happy he’s made Kaminari. *I get to go to the camp, at least*, he thinks, sighing. *It’ll be okay, right?* Izuku’s all too aware of the way Nezu is watching him, a contemplative look on his features, but he sets it aside for now. The cut on his head is aching, the adrenaline is fading, and the strange fuzziness he’d felt is starting to leave him. He lets Kaminari lead him to where the other students who’ve already finished are waiting.

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It’s cool out that evening when Izuku waves goodbye to Kacchan, his friend rolling his eyes and shoving his hands in his pockets as he turns to walk away. Izuku’s house is shaded in orange-red light from the sun setting, and the flowers his mom had planted in the front yard are starting to bloom, finally, gold and orange and white. Izuku can’t tear his eyes from them as he steps up to his door, toeing his bright red sneakers off and picking them up by the backs of the heels as he twists the doorknob, pushing the door inward.

“I’m home,” he calls, softly. He hears a rustling from the back of the house as he sets his shoes down by his mother’s and presses the door shut with his back.

“Izuku? Is that you I hear?” his mom calls back, her face peeking from down the hallway a moment later. “Oh, baby, welcome home!” she says, her face splitting into a grin. “How did your exams go?”

Izuku smiles back at her as he steps, socked feet on cool tile, into the house, but the expression doesn’t reach his eyes. “They were okay,” he says, softly. “I failed my practical, but the rest went well.” Izuku doesn’t look up from the floor as he shuffles into the kitchen, swinging his backpack off of his shoulder and setting it in an empty chair, like he always does. The soft yellow fabric slides easily into the smooth wooden chair. Izuku sighs.

“Oh, honey, I’m sorry,” his mom says, a gentle hand resting on his shoulder. Her thumb rubs soft lines into his back. “Do you want to talk about it?”

Izuku shakes his head. “No, I think it’d make it worse,” he says, almost whispering. “Can we just... hang out?” He turns to look at his mom, sees that his eyes are filling with tears just like his are, sees the way she nods quickly.

“Of course!” She says, smiling slightly. “I have things set up for katsudon, if that’ll make you feel better? I’d meant to start it earlier, of course, but Mitsuki called me and you know how she is over the phone.” His mother rolls her eyes fondly, and Izuku can’t help but smile a bit, remembering that Kacchan’s mom is impossible to have a *short* phone call with, always chattering right through his mom’s attempts to politely end the conversation.

“Katsudon would be great, thanks,” he says, and his mom nods before reaching forward and pulling him into a tight hug.

“I love you, baby, no matter what,” she says, squeezing him tightly. “It’s just one exam.”

Izuku squeezes her back, burying his face in her shoulder. “I know, mom,” he says, breathing in her scent and letting his eyes shut. “I’ll be okay.”

Chapter End Notes

cw: guns, brief mention of vomiting

discord: <https://discord.gg/Vqaj62ceCt>

i hope you all enjoyed!! im sorry again about the shorter length and lower quality of this chapter, I've just been EXHAUSTED today idk why. thank you all for your support as usual!!

mall trip

Chapter Summary

last time: izuku failed his exam but this time for real! and nezu seems to know that his dumb ass is mentally ill

Chapter Notes

HI GAMERS i cannot WAIT for the next arc and also for da weekend so i can actually write all day long instead of cramming it all into the end

also. I've been considering this for a while, but i don't think im going to be able to reply to every single comment anymore :(there are just so many and it takes me a long time to read/reply to them all. i will still read them and reply to questions though!!!! i still appreciate every single one

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

It's late at night, after even his patrol, and Izuku is tucked into the covers of his bed, the comforter wrapped around his face and nestled under his jaw. One of his classmates (he thinks it was Ashido, but he doesn't want to scroll up to check) has made a group chat in honor of their shopping trip tomorrow, and even in the early hours of the morning like this, it's active, pinging with messages and lighting up Izuku's phone. *I'm going to have to start muting it at night*, he thinks distractedly as he reads the most recent message.

I can come tomorrow, it reads, from Tokoyami. *The adults of my household have given me permission.*

Kaminari replies, the message popping up on Izuku's screen. *Dude, nice!!! Ur parents are up this late tho??* Izuku glances up at the time on the top edge of his phone screen. It's just past three a.m., which for Izuku is a pretty normal time to go to bed on nights before days without Aizawa's training.

Yes, night is meaningless for our kind, Tokoyami replies, and Izuku can't help but snort softly in amusement, typing out his own message.

I'll be there for sure, he sends, then, *I need some weights for training and stuff. A flashlight, too.* He'd told everyone he could *probably* make it earlier, but his mom had agreed easily enough, seeming almost relieved to know that he would be at camp and not patrolling the streets.

Whoa, Midoriya ur up this late??? Kaminari replies. *I totally thought u'd be like bakugou and go to bed super early lol.*

Hahah no, he replies, smiling softly at his phone screen. *I have trouble sleeping*. It's not strictly false, since on nights he *doesn't* patrol, Izuku is up late anyway just from being used to it, but Kaminari doesn't need to know that he's out patrolling at night, anyway. Even though tonight's

patrol had been a little shorter than usual, it'd still been fun, still been calming. Even if all he did was break up a couple of fights and help a very, very drunk individual get a cab home, it's good enough for him.

I, as well, have trouble falling asleep, Tokoyami replies. *Are you awake for the same reason, Kaminari?*

Lol, Kaminari sends. *I stay up this late on purpose and then regret it the next day, every time.* Izuku smiles faintly at his phone before typing out a reply.

Well then go to bed!!! He sends, then sends another message. *I'm going to try and sleep myself, I think. We're meeting at the station at 11, right?*

That's correct, Tokoyami replies. *Sleep well, both of you.*

Gn!! Kaminari sends, along with a gif of a cat curling up in a bed and tucking its tail over its nose. Izuku mutes his phone, then locks it and sets it on his bedside table before he curls into his bed and shuts his eyes.

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It's a brilliantly bright day when Izuku and his friends step into the shopping center, the sunshine warm on Izuku's arms even through his sleeves. The shopping mall is all glass and stainless steel and bright paint, and Izuku can't help the way his eyes dart around, moving from display to display as he and his friends step into the area.

"I'm so excited," Ashido says, almost a squeal. "I've gotta get some new pajamas, since my old ones are like, totally worn out," she says, stepping toward one of the larger clothing stores.

"Oh, I'll come with!" Kirishima calls, running after her. "I need a couple of things from that store, too." Izuku blinks, watching as they separate from the group.

"I'm going to go and get some outdoor shoes," Kaminari says, jerking a thumb over his shoulder to point at a store not far away with a bright orange logo.

"Me too, me too!" Hagakure calls, her shirt moving like she's raising her hand. "I totally lost my last pair, it's so embarrassing. How do you even lose shoes?"

"Wait," Iida says, following after them. "The informational packet said to use shoes you're used to, you..." his voice, as well as Kaminari's and Hagakure's, fade away as they step into the store. Izuku blinks, glancing around to see that everyone except for him and Uraraka has disappeared, dissipating into the rest of the mall.

"I guess we all have different stuff we need to get, huh?" Uraraka says, putting a finger to her chin thoughtfully. "I just need bug spray for the trip, but after my final exam I sort of want to get a video camera, too."

Izuku frowns. "A video camera?" he asks, tipping his head to the side. "You were against Midnight in the final, right? Why would that..." Izuku trails off, thinking about Uraraka's final. He hasn't watched the footage, yet, but from what he'd heard, she'd won pretty easily.

"Oh, yeah," Uraraka says, looking uncomfortable. "I was paired up with Mineta, you know? And he said some really creepy stuff, so I was thinking I could maybe get some of it on camera and get him in trouble?" She grimaces, fiddling with the strap of her purse where it's hung on one shoulder. "It kind of feels just as bad for me to film him without permission, though..."

Izuku blinks, then shakes his head. "I don't think there's anything wrong with it if it's for your safety," he says. "What did he do? If he's bothering you, we should tell Aizawa-sensei before the trip." As little as Izuku shares with the adults, he's confident that Aizawa, at least, would take offense to Mineta being creepy towards the girls. It's different than Izuku's own secret, that's for sure, but Izuku thinks that if he *had* to tell one teacher, it'd be Aizawa, anyway. With everything Izuku's said to him during training, with everything he's said to him as *Ace*, Aizawa always offers his help. *That has to count for something, right?*

Uraraka shrugs. "I-It was just stuff like saying he wanted to go on the trip so he could see us in the hot springs," she says, swallowing. "Stuff like that. And there was that one time where he tried to peep in the locker room, y'know? And even though Jirou stopped him, I still kind of think we should have told someone."

Izuku nods. "So you're thinking if you catch him redhanded at the training camp, they'll have to do something." Uraraka nods, humming.

"Mhmm. It's kind of mean of me, but I don't want him to just get a slap on the wrist. I kind of want him to get a real punishment, and I don't think he will without proof." Uraraka looks uncomfortable. "Is that awful of me? I know it's not very heroic, I just--" Izuku cuts her off.

"It's plenty heroic," he says, voice firm. "Being a hero doesn't mean you shouldn't stand up for yourself. In fact, doing this now could stop him from doing worse stuff in the future. I think it's brave of you." He pauses, biting at his lower lip. "I still think you should talk to Aizawa-sensei, though."

"What if he doesn't believe me, though?" Uraraka huffs out a breath of air, like she's frustrated. "I know that this is different, but any time someone like, cat called me in middle school, the teachers just told me to get over it, you know?" She twists her face into a frown. "I don't want him to think I'm just getting Mineta in trouble to be mean."

Izuku bites at his lip because he *knows* that feeling. "I'm sorry, Uraraka," he says. "I can't promise he'll listen, but..." He shrugs. "I think Aizawa-sensei is different, then other teachers. One time during training, I was hurt," he holds up his wrist, tracing where the bruise had once been. "I didn't even tell him about it, and when he saw, he asked who'd done it to me and stuff. It *wasn't* from something serious like that, but if it had been, I could tell he'd be in my corner, y'know?" He glances up, giving Uraraka a soft smile. "Plus, we all know sensei doesn't mind expelling people."

Uraraka nods, smiling at him. "Right," she says. "I'll think about it. Thank you, Deku." She reaches out, setting a hand on his upper arm and giving it a squeeze. "I'll keep you updated on it all, okay?"

Izuku nods, grinning. "Yeah!" He tips his head slightly to the side. "I've gotta buy some workout stuff, but we're all meeting back up for lunch, right?"

Uraraka nods. "Mhmm! I'll see you then, Deku!" Her grin is bright and stretches her cheeks as she bounces off, towards a row of stores off to their left. Izuku sighs, watching her go.

It's not that he's not familiar with what she was talking about; it's that it's *too* familiar. As Izuku steps forward, glancing around for a mall directory, he remembers middle school, remembers being hit and tripped and burned. He remembers telling the teachers, and while he doesn't remember exactly who said what and when, he knows the common thread. *You're being dramatic. Bullies only go after people who give them a reaction. If you don't react, don't get upset, it would stop. They can't help it, they're just playing. A little roughhousing among friends is nothing to worry about. You're just a little fragile, Midoriya. You're just sensitive.*

Izuku knows that, with Uraraka, it's different. Mineta's being like how he is just because he's a bad person, because he's a creep. Uraraka and the other girls haven't done anything to deserve that sort of behavior. Izuku'd always been... irritating. He'd always been the kind of kid to cry at a joke that he was supposed to laugh at. He'd been quirkless, useless. As Izuku steps up to a sign, squinting at the multicolored labels on the map of the mall, he wonders if the reason he wasn't getting bullied at UA is because he'd stopped being so sensitive. Stopped being so annoying. He doesn't know.

Izuku is trying to read the sign, distracting himself by thinking about how Kacchan doesn't hit him anymore, doesn't call him useless as much, when he feels a hand come down on his shoulder, warm and heavy. Izuku blinks, flinching back as he turns to stare directly into the face of Shigaraki Tomura, a wide smile on the man's cracked lips. Izuku swallows. *He looks different without the hand on his face.*

"Midoriya, right?" Shigaraki hums, moving his hand up to rest on the skin of Izuku's neck, his arm thrown over Izuku's shoulder like they're friends. "I was calling to you, you know. It's rude to ignore someone." Izuku can feel that four of his fingers, dry and warm, are resting on Izuku's skin. Shigaraki can probably feel his pulse, can *definitely* feel the way Izuku swallows, throat bobbing.

"I-I was distracted," Izuku says, licking his lips.

"Act like we're old friends," Shigaraki growls, walking forward and tugging Izuku along with him. "Control your breathing and keep your voice down. If you act up, all it'll take is me putting down my last finger and you'll be a pile of dust within seconds."

"Okay," Izuku says, shrugging. "I'm not scared of you." He relishes in the way Shigaraki growls. *Maybe not showing weakness does work with bullies*, he thinks, a smile quirking up on his lips.

"Are you stupid?" Shigaraki mutters. "You know I can kill you in one hit, right? It'll be game over for you." Izuku hums.

"Mm, but you won't, right?" He *can't*, actually, but that's beside the point. "I doubt you'd make it very far if you dusted me now, not in a crowd like this."

Shigaraki laughs, raspy and low. "Sure. But do you think they're expecting something like this? Look at them," he says, gesturing at the crowd. "I bet I could kill twenty, maybe thirty, before someone stopped me," he says, laughing, and it sends a chill down Izuku's spine. He could reset, he can always reset, but the thought of watching Shigaraki kill all of these bystanders, *painfully*, because Izuku couldn't behave?

"I-I'll be good. What do you w-want to talk about?" Izuku whispers, and Shigaraki nods. Izuku can see a grin split his cracking lips.

"There we go," he rasps, leading Izuku to a bench, a wooden thing pressed against an island of ornamental flowers. "Let's sit down. It's more comfortable that way." He turns them, pushing Izuku down so that he's forced to sit down with Shigaraki, the wood of the bench warm from the sun. Izuku shivers despite the warmth, wanting to lean away from where Shigaraki's side touches his own, but he doesn't dare to.

"What I want to talk about, hmm," Shigaraki sighs, his breath sour in Izuku's nose. "You know, to be honest, I didn't think I was gonna run into you here. It's a random event, I guess." Shigaraki laughs, his shoulders shaking slightly. "I've been annoyed, lately. I'm pissed off about the hero killer getting all of the attention." Izuku swallows.

“Aren’t you two buddies?” he asks. Shigaraki sighs next to him, and Izuku chews on the inside of his lip to keep himself from jerking away when Shigaraki’s grip on his neck tightens slightly.

“As if. I only worked with that creep because we needed the manpower.” Shigaraki’s voice lowers, getting raspier. “The media just decided that because we teamed up once, that we were allies or something. It’s fucking stupid.” Shigaraki sighs, huffing out a breath of hot air. “I don’t get why he’s everyone’s new favorite guy. What’s so special about him? What makes him and I different? Fangirl, too. She was there in Hosu, and she was all over the news, but now she’s gone completely. They forgot about me and her in a week, but Stain is everybody’s new best friend!” His other hand twitches in his lap, and Izuku finds himself staring at it. He wonders why Shigaraki doesn’t wear gloves when he’s out and about, like this.

“It’s because of his message,” Izuku mumbles, still watching Shigaraki’s arm. “People like the idea of justice. Of righteous killing. It’s why people like heroes in the first place. With Stain, they might not like what he’s done, but they agree with his ideas, you know? They like the idea of punishing those who have done wrong, those who used their power to hurt others.” Izuku breathes out, slow. “You and Fangirl, though, I don’t think they can relate to at all. Nobody knows what she wants, why she was there, and with you, all you want is destruction. If you have a reason for it, nobody’s heard it. So of course they like Stain better.” Izuku winces in pain as Shigaraki’s fingers dig into his flesh, pressing the man’s nail into the skin of his throat. Izuku feels more than sees the way Shigaraki starts to shake.

“So it’s because I don’t have a reason?” Shigaraki hisses, picking up his other hand to scratch at his neck. “I have a reason. Everything has a reason. I hate you, Midoriya. I really, really hate you, you know that.” Izuku feels Shigaraki’s fingers compress his throat, making it hard to breathe. The pressure builds up in his skull and he tries to push himself away, but Shigaraki’s grip only tightens.

“Ah ah ah, you don’t want me to kill all of them, do you?” Shigaraki asks, tipping his head at the people walking around them. “You don’t think my vendetta is righteous? You don’t think I want justice?” Shigaraki shakes his head. “When I kill All Might, it’ll be for a *reason*, Midoriya. I’ll punish him for what he’s done wrong. Even if nobody understands, I’ll make sure he pays the price.” Shigaraki digs his fingers in, squeezes.

“What did he do wrong?” Izuku asks. “What does he need to pay for?” And then, he takes a risk. “He hurt me, too, Shigaraki.” Shigaraki freezes, his fingers going lax on Izuku’s neck but not pulling away.

“*What?!*” Shigaraki hisses. “He--He’s your *teacher*. He’s your *friend*. You--How did he hurt you? Tell me,” he snarls, and Izuku sees blood out of the corner of his eye, on Shigaraki’s neck. Izuku takes a deep breath.

“I-It’s not as bad as whatever he did to you,” Izuku says. “But I’m quirkless, and I asked him if I could be a hero,” Izuku says, swallowing. Shigaraki’s grip tightens on his neck. “We were on a roof. He told me I couldn’t be a hero, that I should give up on my dream. He told me I should give up, and he left me on a roof.”

Shigaraki sighs, the movement shuddery and strange. “You’re right,” he says, pulling his hand off of Izuku’s neck. “That’s not as bad as what he did to me.” Izuku turns, staring at him. Shigaraki’s red eyes are narrowed, his lips drawn into a frown.

“The Gekkeiju,” Izuku says, his mouth moving without his permission. “They have a captive named Avenging Angel. Do you know where they’re keeping her?” Shigaraki snorts, standing up and shoving his hands in his pockets. He looks back at Izuku, an eyebrow raised.

“I have no clue, and if I did, why on earth would I tell a brat like you?” Shigaraki stares at Izuku, a faint smile on his face for just a moment before it drops and he asks, “So why didn’t you jump?” Izuku’s still seated on the bench, looking up at Shigaraki. The hood over Shigaraki’s head casts a shadow over his eyes, over the bridge of his nose. His lips are parted slightly, his eyes half lidded. His red irises seem to glow.

“I don’t know,” Izuku answers, barely more than a whisper, because he can’t exactly say that he *did*. “I guess I didn’t listen to him.”

Shigaraki snorts. “I guess not,” he says, turning. Izuku sighs, watching him go. Out of the corner of his eye, he sees Uraraka run to him, fear and concern plain on her face.

“Deku, was that *Shigaraki*? From the League of Villains?” Uraraka bites her lip, stepping forward. “Oh my gosh, your neck...” She reaches into her pocket, pulling out her phone and typing into it quickly.

“I-I’m okay, really,” Izuku says, because the threat of death really doesn’t bother him at this point. “He just wanted to talk.” Uraraka squints at him, holding the phone to her ear.

“Hello? Yes, please send the police and some heroes to the Kiyashi ward mall. There was just a villain who attacked my friend. Yes, I can stay on the line. Nobody is hurt except my friend, and he just has some bruising, I think.” She pauses, putting a hand over the receiver and leaning away to look at Izuku. “Are you hurt anywhere else? They want to know if they should send an ambulance or just a medic.”

Izuku shakes his head. “I-I’m fine, really. It’s just bruised, like you said.” He reaches up a hand to touch his throat. It feels warm to the touch, but not painful. “It doesn’t even hurt.”

Uraraka gives him a disbelieving look, shaking her head. “I’m just glad you’re okay,” she says. “That was so scary. He could have killed you, Deku.” She presses her lips together and steps forward, pulling him into a hug. “When I saw him, here with you, I--”

“Uraraka, it’s okay,” Izuku says, and he hears faint talking on the other side of the receiver. “The emergency services, I think they’re asking you something.” He pats her back gently as she nods, pulling away from the hug to press the phone back to her ear.

Izuku waits patiently for the police to arrive. The whole time, he replays his conversation with Shigaraki in his head, over and over like a broken record. *All Might hurt him*, Izuku thinks. *But what did he do?*

--

When Izuku is sitting in a too-hard chair at the police station, facing Detective Tsukauchi from across a neat table, he’s not sure why he’s surprised, really. Tsukauchi sits down, pushing a mug across the table at Izuku, a smile on the man’s face.

“We really need to stop meeting like this, Midoriya,” Tsukauchi jokes, a light smile on his face. “You know, I never actually asked if you like hot cocoa, I just kind of assumed.”

“I-I like it,” Izuku replies, reaching forward to wrap a hand around the mug, the warmth seeping through the ceramic and into his hand. It’s a plain mug, just white, but there’s a chip in the handle, and Izuku runs his thumb over it, feeling the rough patch in the middle of the smooth, glazed surface.

“Good, good. I would offer you coffee, but you’re a little young for it,” he says, giving Izuku a

friendly smile as he sets his notebook down on the table in front of him, clicking his pen open. “Now, this should be easy. I’m just trying to see if there’s anything new we can learn about Shigaraki from this encounter.”

Izuku nods. “I-I figured,” he says. He runs his finger over the chip in the mug, over and over again. “I think there’s something you should know,” he starts, then shuts his mouth, pressing his lips together. Tsukauchi tips his head to the side slightly.

“Go ahead, Midoriya,” he says, voice kind. “What is it?” His pen is resting on the paper, but his eyes are on Izuku.

“Shigaraki was wronged by All Might at some point,” Izuku says. “And I think that’s why he’s doing this. He’s also working with the other villain group--the Gekkeiju--for sure, but I don’t think it’s as closely as before. And he’s really mad that Stain is going viral and he isn’t.” Izuku presses his thumb into the chip in the mug. It’s not sharp, but it’s close, and it stings a little bit. He watches Tsukauchi’s pen fly across the paper, making quick notes.

“It sounds like you know exactly what kind of information I’m looking for,” Tsukauchi says, lifting his eyes to look up at Izuku. “Is there anything else you know? Especially if he mentioned any names, dates, or locations.” Izuku shakes his head.

“He didn’t say anything like that,” Izuku says. The mug is hot enough that it’s scalding his skin, but he doesn’t think Tsukauchi notices. “He did say it was an accident that he ran into me, though.” Izuku wonders when he’ll be allowed to go. His neck hurts.

“Thank you,” Tsukauchi says, giving Izuku a smile and a nod. “I’ll let you go, then. Aizawa is waiting for you in the lobby,” he says, standing up and pushing his chair back. Izuku blinks.

“Aizawa-sensei is?” Izuku asks, feeling like his head too full and too empty all at once.

Tsukauchi nods. “You’re handling this really well, but you’ve just been through a traumatic event. He’s going to make sure you get home to your mom alright.” He smiles slightly. “You know, it’s thanks to you that there weren’t any serious injuries from this event. You did really well, keeping calm and gathering information like you did. You’ll make a wonderful hero one day.”

Izuku blinks. “R-Really?” he blurts out, not thinking. Tsukauchi just nods.

“Really. Now, come on. I want to get you to your teacher before he gets too irritated with me for keeping you,” he says, and Izuku nods, rising to his feet. He follows Tsukauchi out of the room, and it’s only when they step into the lobby that he realizes he hadn’t even touched the hot cocoa.

Aizawa looks even more disheveled than usual, with his hair in a messy ponytail and his capture weapon laid haphazardly across his neck and shoulders. He’s wearing his hero costume, but it looks like he’s just thrown it on, the fabric wrinkled in places. He looks tired, but not in the usual way, almost like he’d just woken up. When Izuku and Tsukauchi step into the room, he stands up, his eyes half lidded as they look at Izuku.

“Are you alright, problem child?” he asks, taking a few quick steps forward and reaching a hand forward to tilt Izuku’s head back ever so slightly, examining his neck.

“I-I’m okay,” Izuku says, and Aizawa grunts, releasing his jaw.

“You’re a villain magnet,” Aizawa replies. “Let’s get you home. I’ve already called your mother to tell her you’re on your way out.” He turns, marching toward the door out of the police station, and Izuku blinks, twisting his head to look up at Tsukauchi.

“Can I...?” he gestures to the door, where Aizawa is yanking it open. Tsukauchi nods.

“Be safe, Midoriya,” he says as Izuku turns, following his sensei out of the building. The night is cool and quiet, a stark contrast to the day, with the summer heat and the hustle and bustle of the mall. Aizawa is quiet, but Izuku can hear his footsteps on the concrete, can hear the way their rhythm slows to allow Izuku to catch up. Aizawa glances at him from the sides of his eyes, and sighs.

“Midoriya,” he says, voice low and rough. “I got a call from Nezu earlier today. It was about your final exam.”

Izuku blinks. “O-Oh,” he says, his heart starting to beat faster in his chest. Aizawa sighs, slipping his hands into his pockets.

“He was concerned for your mental health,” Aizawa explains. “He said it’d be fine for you to keep talking to me, but he suggested you get actual therapy. I think it’d be a good idea.” Izuku can tell that Aizawa is watching him, but trying to be subtle about it. Izuku bites his lip.

“I-I don’t need it,” he says. “Talking with you is enough.” Izuku blinks, looking around. “Wait, sensei, the train station is the other way.

Aizawa arches an eyebrow. “I drove. You were attacked by a villain today. I’m not making you take the train.” He pulls a set of car keys out of his pocket, waving them in the air. They jangle, catching the light and making a soft sound. Izuku blinks.

“Oh,” he answers, because he’s tired and he can’t think of anything else to say. Aizawa stops, standing in front of a small blue car with a scratched front bumper, clicking the keys and unlocking the car. He opens the passenger door for Izuku but doesn’t wait for him to get in, instead walking around to the driver’s side and getting in himself. Izuku climbs into the car, settling into the grey fabric seat and shutting the door behind him. It smells like peaches in the car, like fruit and vanilla. Izuku wonders if Aizawa sprays something in it to make it smell that way, or if it’s from him eating in the vehicle.

“Midoriya, I need to ask you something,” Aizawa says as he sticks the keys in the ignition, turning them. The car roars to life as Izuku buckles his seatbelt. “You need to be honest, even if you’re scared.” Izuku blinks, turning to see Aizawa staring at him seriously.

“O-Okay?” Izuku replies, feeling a little lost. Aizawa takes a small breath.

“Are you suicidal?” he asks, and Izuku feels his eyes widen ever-so-slightly.

“N-No,” Izuku replies instantly, shaking his head. Aizawa’s eyes narrow.

“Do you mean that, or are you just saying that because you think it’s the right answer?” Aizawa asks. “Nezu explained to me your method of fighting, and frankly, I’m concerned for you. Especially after today.” Aizawa swallows. “I haven’t had a student die yet, and I really don’t want you to be the first.” He stares Izuku down, dark irises gleaming faintly in the light that filters through the car windows. “So I’ll ask it again. Are you suicidal?”

Izuku swallows, breathes. “No,” he answers. “I’m not.” He hates himself for lying, but he doesn’t have any choice, does he? *It’s not like it’s really killing myself, anyway*, he thinks as Aizawa nods, some of the tension bleeding out of his shoulders. *It’s not like I actually die. Suicide is a bad thing; what I’m doing isn’t.*

Izuku drifts off into sleep on the drive back, and when he does, he finds himself dreaming about

Shigaraki's hands, Shigaraki's quirk. About his skin and his muscles and his bones turning to dust, piece by piece, flaking away and drifting into the wind. Izuku dreams about *having* Shigaraki's quirk, on top of his own. He dreams about killing himself by dissolving into dust, by fading away into nothingness, over and over again.

Chapter End Notes

cw: none i think

discord: <https://discord.gg/Vqaj62ceCt>

i hope u are all having good weeks!!! next chap is the first training camp arc chap and i am SO EXCITED

summer camp, part 1

Chapter Summary

last time: izuku gets shiggy with it at the mall, aizawa asks him if he's suicidal and he's like NO DEFINITELY NOT

Chapter Notes

what's UP gamers and nerds here's a chapter im dying of excitement for this arc hope it lives up to the hype

also tried some different stuff in this chapter esp since a lot of this is just the build up to the Thing we all know Happens at the summer camp

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

The night before they leave for summer camp is a humid, sticky night. It had rained in the afternoon, when Izuku was at the grocery store with his mom, picking up ingredients for the katsudon she'd made them for dinner that night. The rain had only been a light drizzle, sprinkling down from the sky and falling over the asphalt, painting the city in bright colors and filling the air with the scent of ozone, but now that it's been a few hours, it's muggy and hot. Izuku breathes, the motion sucking his mask in towards his face and then pushing it out. The fabric of it feels sticky.

Izuku follows the line of a road he sometimes patrols along. He doesn't watch it *every* night, mostly because it's a common route for the early evening heroes to patrol, and he wants his time to be as useful as possible. Today, though, he's walking this way for a purely selfish reason; this street borders a small island of trees within the city. Now that it's summer (the first of July-- Izuku'd ripped the June page off of the calendar before leaving on patrol), if he's near enough to trees, he can see flickering, bobbing lights, green and yellow among the trees. Izuku should be patrolling properly, but he doesn't get to see fireflies often, and there's something calm about walking along the sidewalk, watching the clumsy little lights drifting around.

It's probably because he's watching the fireflies bop around that he doesn't notice the figure as early as he might otherwise, but it also could be because of the light fog that clings to the bottom of the wooded area to his right. It's not really *forest*, since it's only about the width of a block and the length of three, but it seems to be enough to hold the mist, to have it cling to the ground. Izuku sees the person before they see him, though, and he blinks, squinting behind his goggles. The person is leaned against a tree, their fluffy, messy hair standing on end. They're wearing baggy, dark clothes, but their face is illuminated by the light of the phone they're holding, their hands resting against their knees which are almost drawn up to their chest. Izuku blinks again, because he recognizes this person. *Shinsou?* he thinks quietly to himself as he steps forward.

"Hey," he says instead, because he knows that Ace doesn't have a reason to know Shinsou. "Are you alright?" he asks, giving Shinsou a little wave when he jerks in surprise, glancing up and narrowing his eyes slightly. The bags under his eyes are darker than usual, and when Shinsou turns

off his phone screen and shoves it into his pocket, his face is covered in shadow. His violet hair looks grey in the dim light, mixing with the fog that swirls on the ground.

"I'm fine," Shinsou says, standing up. "You're that vigilante who's been running around for a few months. Ace, or something like that." Shinsou licks his lower lip, and Izuku's gaze catches there, on the small split in Shinsou's lip. It looks like he could have bitten through it, maybe, but Izuku thinks it's more likely he got hit, judging from the slight bruising he thinks he can see. Or maybe it's a shadow. It's far too dark to know for sure.

"That's me," Izuku replies. "What are you doing out so late?" He tips his head slightly to the side, keeps his voice and tone lower and slower than his natural voice. "It's dangerous to be out alone, you know."

Shinsou snorts, rolling his eyes. "You're like, thirteen. I should be saying that to you." His eyes flicker over Izuku, narrowing. "You look awfully familiar," he says, voice hesitant.

"I'm sure you've seen me around," Izuku replies, "if you're out late like this often."

Shinsou shrugs. "I wouldn't call it *often*," he says, kicking at the ground, his shoe scuffing in it. "I'm fine, though. You can go fight people or whatever it is vigilantes do."

Izuku raises an eyebrow, tilting his head slightly to the side. "Vigilantes can also help people out if they're in trouble," he says. "Aren't you that kid from UA? I watched the sports festival."

Shinsou snorts. "Of course you did." He glances down, at the ground. A firefly flickers in lime green by his cheek. "I don't need any help," he says, but his voice is small. Izuku crosses his arms over his chest, leans on one leg.

"Then how come you're out in the woods at three in the morning?" Izuku asks. Shinsou looks up at him, face flat.

"It's my birthday," Shinsou drawls. "If you watched the sports festival, then do you know my quirk?" It's the first question Shinsou's asked, and Izuku recognizes the challenge immediately.

"I do," he responds, and he doesn't let himself tense up. He doesn't let himself show any surprise or fear when Shinsou stares up at him, a heavy look in his hooded eyes. A grin splits his face, showing his straight teeth, and Izuku feels something settle into his mind, something thick and wispy like the fog that curls over the ground. It doesn't feel malicious, doesn't feel violent, but it's not like he's gone to sleep, either. The world just becomes distant, misty and slow. Izuku sees Shinsou stand up, brushing off the legs of his jeans. He steps closer to Izuku, his face impassive.

"You're pretty stupid," Shinsou says, close enough that Izuku could reach and touch him, if he was in control of his own body. "Did you think I wouldn't use it on you?" He tilts his head slightly to the side. Izuku can't reply, can't move his own mouth, so he simply stares.

The release of the quirk is more dramatic than the start of it was; everything comes back into sharp focus all at once. Izuku blinks ghosts of fog away from his eyes, gives his head a little shake, then looks at Shinsou, who's still standing in front of him. It's clear, now, that he's been punched in the lip, along his jaw. There's a soft bruise blooming there, almost the color of Shinsou's hair. A firefly buzzes by Izuku's ear, flickering yellow off and on.

"I knew you would," Izuku says. "You've heard about me, so I suppose you know about my quirk, too." He doesn't really ask a question, and Shinsou doesn't really answer.

"You saw the future," he says, deadpan. "You knew, and you answered anyway." Izuku nods. He

wonders if, from this close up, Shinsou can see his eyes through the reflective coating on his goggles. *Probably not*, he thinks. *He'd have reacted in some way if he recognized me* .

“Happy birthday,” Izuku says, and the edges of Shinsou’s lips quirk up into a bitter smile.

“Yeah,” he says, turning and walking back into the woods, his hands sliding into the kangaroo pocket at the front of his hoodie. “Some birthday it’s been,” he mutters.

“If I can--” Izuku starts, but he cuts himself off when Shinsou raises a hand to stop him.

“You can’t help with this,” he says. “Have a good night, Ace.”

Izuku watches him go, watches him step into the woods, mist swirling around him until he disappears. When he’s out of sight, out of *earshot* , Izuku whispers to himself,

“You too, Shinsou.” He tries not to, but the rest of the patrol is spent wondering why Shinsou was alone, outside, and hurt on his birthday. He doesn’t like any of the reasons his mind comes up with.

--

The bus ride is a strange thing. Izuku isn’t sure if he’s ever been on a trip like this and *not* been afraid of the people he’s gone with, but the feeling is certainly strange. It’s oddly reminiscent of the bus ride to USJ, when he’d seen Kacchan of all people getting made fun of, and something about it squeezes at his heart. Izuku doesn’t know what he’d do, without his friends.

Take right now, for example. When Izuku’d gotten on the bus, when he’d settled into his seat near the back of the bus, he’d been a live wire of nerves, vibrating just under the surface. His mind had been filled with memories, with the times he’d been on a bus as a kid. Like when he was four, old enough to have a quirk but not old enough to know he *didn’t* and he was sitting beside Kacchan, playing war with a battered deck of cards. Every time Kacchan had slapped down a card, his palms had sputtered and sparked. He had insisted it was on purpose, but when Izuku pointed out the way his palms were scalded red and blistering, the way that Kacchan was wincing with each blast, Kacchan refused to play card with him the entire rest of the trip.

Or when Izuku was six and he knew he was quirkless, knew he was useless, and all of the other kids on the bus refused to sit near him, refused to talk to him. They hadn’t figured out, yet, that his condition wasn’t contagious. They talked *about* him, though, whispers and mean words under their breaths. Izuku’d heard every one, just like when he was twelve and it was a middle school field trip.

He’d been sitting funny, leaning forward and keeping his back away from the seat behind him because he had a burn the size and shape of Kacchan’s newest attack that stretched from the top of his hip up to the bottom edge of his shoulder blade on the right side of his back. Every motion of the bus, every shift and bump, moved his clothes against the wound, making Izuku gasp under his breath, making him tear up. The kids at the front of the bus laughed at him, calling him a weakling and a crybaby. Izuku knew better than to acknowledge them. He didn’t react, not on purpose, but he couldn’t help but cry, and the teacher chaperoning the trip told him, quietly, once they’d gotten off the bus, that he really should stop giving them what they wanted. *It’s like you’re rewarding them, really*, he’d told Izuku, shaking his head.

So when Izuku sat on the bus for *this* trip, he’d been sweaty and nervous and *jumpy* . He’d wanted off, wanted to go home, except when Uraraka got on the bus she sat right next to him. When Todoroki and Iida and Tsuyu had gotten on the bus, they’d filled the seats as close as they could, smiling and laughing. When Izuku’d flinched at a sudden movement of Iida’s hand in the seat in

front of him, they'd paused. Tsuyu had asked him if he was alright. He'd told them that buses make him nervous, that he doesn't like them. He didn't know what he'd expected, but.

But now, he's sitting in his seat, wrapped in a blanket that Iida had fished out of his luggage, a blanket that Todoroki had used his left side to warm up for him. His hands, poking out of the navy blue, plush blanket, are wrapped around a cool bottle of water, something that Tsuyu had asked Aizawa for, had gotten up and walked to the front of the bus to get for *him*. His mouth tastes like ginger, spicy and warm from the ginger candy Uraraka'd given him a few minutes ago, in case he got motion sick. Now, surrounded by his friends, Izuku actually thinks he might *like* bus trips.

"This is nice," he whispers from where he's leaned up against Todoroki's left side, soaking up the warmth. "You guys are being so nice to me."

Todoroki glances down at him, something soft and surprised in his eyes. "Of course," he says. "If our friend is sick, it's natural that we'd want to help. That's what heroes do, right?"

"Right," Izuku says. "I'm not sick, though," he points out. Todoroki blinks at him.

"Okay. If our friend is upset," he corrects. From the seat in front of them, Tsuyu turns, her head tipped to the side slightly.

"It's good practice, too, ribbit," she croaks. "Not only does it help our friend, but it'll also help us later on when we have to take care of victims."

"I mean," Izuku starts, "I-I'm not like, a victim of anything." He chuckles lightly, but Todoroki hums thoughtfully beside him.

"Maybe not in the sense that Tsuyu was talking about, but you were upset for a reason, right? Somebody hurt you," he observes, meeting Izuku's gaze. "Even if it wasn't just now, it still hurt." Izuku swallows.

"I-I..." he takes a deep breath. "Yeah. S-Someone did, but it's okay now," he says, squeezing his fingers into the plastic of the water bottle, crinkling it. Todoroki and Tsuyu don't say anything else, but Izuku feels a pulse of comforting heat from Todoroki's side, and Tsuyu smiles at them before turning back to the front of the bus.

--

The forest is a wild thing, would be a wild thing even without the earthen beasts that rise from the soil, brushing aside trees like they're twigs, swimming through the trees effortlessly. Even from the moment the bus is parked and they're told to run to the camp themselves, to get there before lunch, Izuku knows that this will take longer. They can't even *see* the camp from their vantage point on the top of the hill, just a huge stretch of wooded land, green and thick with leaves. Izuku's spent enough time running, weaving through streets and buildings that don't even have the natural hazards that the forest will that he knows it'll take far more time than the Wild Wild Pussycats claim it will.

As Izuku runs through the woods now, his legs burning from the effort of having been moving like this for well over three hours, he's just hoping this was intentional on the part of the pros. He can't imagine it wouldn't be, not with the way Pixie-Bob's clay creatures are always there, fighting them and following them as they run, but never striking too hard, never hurting them in any way worse than a few scratches or light bruises. Izuku wonders how close Ragdoll is, for them to have this level of coordination.

There's something exhilarating about running through the woods like this, though, in much the same way running through the city is for Izuku. The scenery is so different that it's striking, the green of the leaves and the rich, deep browns of the tree trunks, the yellow and white of wildflowers blooming in patches where light reaches the forest floor. As Izuku runs, his shoes crunch through the leaves, kicking them up in his wakes. The forest smells clean and clear, green and damp in a way that the city never smells, not even on the rainiest day.

It's probably because it smells and looks and sounds so different from his usual environment that Izuku feels unsettled like he does, feels a prickle of anxiety as he moves through the trees. Like he's being watched, except he *knows* he's being watched--by Ragdoll and the other pros on the trip. He knows he's safe, here.

But he can't shake that anxious feeling, no matter how much he justifies to himself that he knows there's nothing wrong.

--

After arriving at the campsite, after eating a dinner that tastes so good Izuku thinks he's probably died and gone to heaven, after unpacking their things, Izuku follows behind his classmates, trailing a short distance after them as they all walk to the hot springs. It smells nice, in the way that hot springs do, sulfurous and damp and clean, but Izuku has goosebumps rising under the robe he's wearing to keep his arms covered.

His friends are mostly in towels wrapped around waists, not robes, and it makes Izuku more than a little self conscious. His nerves are alleviated the smallest bit by the fact that beside Izuku, walking slowly and hanging back, just like him, Todoroki is also in a robe, white and thick. His eyes, grey and teal, keep flickering over to Izuku, then darting away. Izuku wonders if Todoroki's looking at the scrape on the underside of Izuku's jaw, from where he'd walked into a particularly sharp branch, or if there's something else.

"Midoriya," Todoroki says when they get to the edge of the bathing area, thick steam rising around them. It sticks to Izuku's skin, making him feel damp and sticky, even more so than he did from his sweat alone. Izuku tips his head slightly at his friend.

"What's up?" he asks, and Todoroki glances to the side, then starts walking.

"I have an idea," he says, leading Izuku a bit away from the others, toward a small pool that's about fifteen feet from the main ones. It's quiet, the surface of the water smooth and glassy as steam rises up from it. Izuku blinks at it.

"I-I'm good, Todoroki," Izuku says, giving Todoroki a faint smile. "I think I'll just bathe in private, I-later." Todoroki tips his head at him.

"We could bathe here," he says, swallowing. "Together." Izuku blinks.

"W-What?" he asks, trying to process what Todoroki had just said. Todoroki, who changes in the bathrooms, too. Todoroki, who is incredibly private, even now that he and Izuku are friends, even now that Izuku knows about his dad. Todoroki doesn't seem phased.

"You're hiding scars," Todoroki says, mismatched eyes wide and honest, "right?"

Izuku blinks, opens his mouth to answer, but Todoroki holds up his own arm, his hand resting on the cloth that covers his skin. Izuku stares as Todoroki pulls back his sleeve slightly, revealing the smooth muscle underneath. And the scars. Izuku can see them, twisted, red marks, none as obvious

as his face but still clearly *burn* scars. Izuku's seen Todoroki's arms before, but not like this, not without fire and grime and adrenaline in the way. Izuku blinks.

"Oh," he says, and Todoroki lets his sleeve drop. "T-That's not why," Izuku says, biting at his lower lip, but Todoroki's gaze drops meaningfully to Izuku's arms where they're clasped in front of him, his fingers twisted together.

"I..." Todoroki swallows. "I know that you hurt yourself," he says, and Izuku feels his jaw drop, feels his eyes widen. "I don't know *how* I know, but... you do, right?" He glances back up at Izuku, and all Izuku can do is stare, open mouthed.

"I-I don't!" Izuku says, taking a step back. "Y-You can't say anything. You c-can't tell anyone, I-I-" Todoroki cuts him off, shaking his head.

"I'm not going to get you in trouble for it," Todoroki says. "I think it's your quirk, that it's why I know." He frowns, thinking. "It can... leak, onto others, right?" Izuku squints at him.

"I don't have a quirk," he replies, but Todoroki keeps going.

"I don't remember it well, but I've seen it. You." Todoroki swallows, looking uncomfortable. "Cutting yourself." He swallows again. "So I already know."

Izuku shakes his head. "I-I really don't have a quirk, Todoroki, so I don't know how you'd know that," he says, even though what he *wants* to do is ask how much Todoroki remembers, how much he knows. *He clearly doesn't think I was trying to kill myself, but he knows I cut myself. But how? How does he remember? It doesn't make sense, even with what happened at the sports festival.*

"If I'm wrong, and there's another reason, that's okay," Todoroki says, sighing. "I don't mean to pry. I just thought you'd like to use the hot springs now, before bed." He turns to the side, crouching down in front of the water. "I can..." He places his hands over the water, frost gathering on his right hand, and suddenly there's a thick cloud of steam rising from the water, clouding the area in mist so thick that Izuku can barely see Todoroki in front of him.

"Oh," Izuku says, blinking down at Todoroki, who smiles up at him.

"Is it okay if I...?" Todoroki tugs slightly at the front of his robe, and Izuku blinks, then nods.

"Y-Yeah, it's fine." He blushes, looking away as Todoroki disrobes and gets into the water.

"Thank you," he says, quietly. "This was... It was really thoughtful." He sighs, steeling himself, and he drops his own robe, stepping into the side of the spring opposite Todoroki. The water is warm in the best way, soothing the ache of his overworked muscles and sinking deep into his skin. Izuku sighs in contentment as he slides into the water, the rippling surface of it rising up to his shoulders. He looks up, across the pool, and he sees Todoroki looking at him with a curious look on his face.

"I thought they'd be vertical," Todoroki says, then flushes red, shaking his head. "I'm sorry, that was rude." Izuku gives him a shaky smile, glancing down at the thin, parallel marks on his arms, clustered in the three inches above and the two inches below his elbow.

"I-It's okay," he says. "It's actually kind of... relaxing?" he says, chuckling slightly. "To have someone know. I-I didn't think it would be, but--" he stops talking when he sees Todoroki nodding a faint smile on his face.

"That's how I felt when I told you," he says, reaching up his left hand to trace along the edges of the scar on his eye. "About my father, and my scar. It was like... it wasn't such a heavy burden any

more.” He sighs, his muscled shoulders rising and falling with the motion.

“Yeah,” Izuku breathes. “That’s exactly what it’s like.” He relaxes, letting his eyes slide shut, leaning his head back against the edge of the spring.

“Are those... burn scars?” Todoroki asks, voice curious and nothing else. Izuku peeks one eye open to look at him. His right side is giving off a thick fog, drifting up around them in wisps. Izuku glances down at himself, at the multitude of small scars he has on his skin, shiny and starburst shaped. They’re not as big or as rippled and red as Todoroki’s, and none of Todoroki’s other scars even compare to the one on his face, but they do look similar.

“Kind of,” Izuku murmurs in response. He moves his hand under water, tracing over a scar on his forearm, where Kacchan had grabbed him and exploded. That one had blistered, gone bright red and oozed and burned. Izuku’d kept it bandaged for so long that he’d started to wonder if it would never heal.

“Bakugou,” Todoroki says, and it’s not a question. He says it with something dark in his voice, something accusatory. When Izuku looks back up at him, there’s a sort of flame in his eyes.

“I-It’s different, now,” Izuku says, swallowing. “He’s not like that, not anymore.” Todoroki’s brows furrow, slightly.

“But he did this to you,” he says, voice slightly confused. “Your scars, they’re not from just one or two days. Those are from *years*,” he says, holding up his own arm, as if to compare. Izuku knows he’s right, knows that the pattern of scarring, the old mixed with older mixed with too-fresh means that Izuku’s been burned, over and over again. Izuku shakes his head anyway.

“He did,” he says, sighing. “He did hurt me, but he doesn’t any more. We’re *friends*, now.” Todoroki frowns.

“Friends don’t hurt each other,” Todoroki says. “Not doing it any more doesn’t make it *okay*.” Izuku shakes his head.

“He apologized,” he says. “He apologized, and he’s trying to make up for it. I think. So I’m forgiving him. Or, well,” he scratches at the side of his neck. “I’m trying to.”

Todoroki blinks at him, slowly. “Do you think,” he starts, swallowing. “Do you think it makes me a bad person, if I know I’ll never forgive my...?” Izuku blinks, shakes his head.

“No, it doesn’t,” Izuku says. “We’re different people. I-It’s different circumstances.” He takes a deep breath. “It’s different.”

Todoroki nods, looking back down at the water, solemn. “You know it’s still abuse,” Todoroki says, “when a friend hurts you, like that. It may be different than my father and I, but it’s still abuse.”

Izuku glances down at the water, at his own reflection, warped and obscured by the fog. “Yeah,” he whispers. “I know.”

--

It’s a bright morning the next day, the sunlight streaming through the trees and casting sharp shadows on the clearing they’re standing in. Izuku watches, something bitter and painful in his chest, as Aizawa and Vlad King organize the other students, directing them to their places and instructing them on how to train their quirks. It’s something that he wishes he’d be able to do,

something that, even though he's a UA student and in the hero course and *technically* he has a quirk, reminds him how fundamentally different he is from his classmates. How he's lacking. The sun is warm on his skin, and he's already wishing that he had the option to wear short sleeves.

"Midoriya," a familiar voice says, sneering, and Izuku turns to see Monoma, staring at him with narrow eyes and a sly smirk. "I've heard a little rumor that you failed your final exam." He giggles. "Not so smart now, are you?" He leans in towards Izuku slightly, and Izuku leans back.

"D-Didn't you fail, too?" Izuku asks, biting at his lower lip. Monoma glares at him, folding his arms over his chest.

"Maybe," he answers. "But there's just something so *satisfying* about you failing, too." He grins, wide and predatory. "You're getting left out of quirk training too, aren't you? Oh, this is good." Izuku frowns, opening his mouth to reply, but he's interrupted by Aizawa's voice behind him.

"Midoriya, Monoma," Aizawa drawls, and Izuku turns, blinking in surprise to see his teacher standing behind him, hands in his pockets. "You two are last," he says, and Izuku blinks.

"B-But I can't do quirk training," Izuku blurts out. "I-I don't have a quirk *to* train." Aizawa stares at him, arches an eyebrow.

"You won't be training to use a quirk," Aizawa says. "You'll be training to fight against them." He turns to Monoma. "Monoma, you'll be training to increase the length of time you can hold others' quirks, as well as your ability to use them. I want you to copy quirks as you please, but use them until your time runs out. Fight Midoriya with them." Aizawa's gaze slips over to Izuku. "You should be fairly evenly matched, even with your quirk."

Monoma huffs. "Are you kidding me? With the use of any of these quirks," he gestures to class 1-A and 1-B where they're training, "destroying him will be a *breeze*. It's honestly cruel for you to even pair us up!" His eyes slide to Izuku, narrowed by his wide smirk.

"Why don't you find out?" Aizawa says, sighing. "Don't kill each other. If you do, I'll have to fill out paperwork." He turns, shuffling away from them without another word. Izuku stares after him.

"Well then," Monoma says. "I guess I should go and grab a couple of quirks," he turns, humming as he walks off, toward his classmates. Izuku blinks.

This is certainly going to be an interesting trip .

Chapter End Notes

cw: implied canon child abuse, bullying, implied vomiting i think

discord: <https://discord.gg/Vqaj62ceCt>

i hope this one was okay!!!! i forgot how much of the training camp in canon was like.... chill. like, there were whole ass DAYS until the league popped in

thank you for the support as always!!! ily guys sm

summer camp, part 2

Chapter Summary

last time: izuku sees shinsou as ace, izuku takes da bus, the summer training camp starts

Chapter Notes

hi guys here's 5.3k words of what im sure looks like random garbage but i promise it's all important for setting later stuff up it just took way more words than i thought

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Izuku isn't sure exactly what he expected the remedial classes to be, but now that he, Kirishima, Satou, and Monoma are sat in the annex building together, in desks and watching Aizawa slowly extract himself from that bright yellow sleeping bag, Izuku relaxes the smallest bit. *It's really just class*, he thinks.

Aizawa's gaze flickers to him as he steps out of the sleeping bag, a smirk creeping up on his teacher's face, and Izuku thinks that he stands corrected. Aizawa glances around the class, slowly, and tips his head slightly to the side.

"So," he says. "Do you all know why you failed your practical exam?" Izuku swallows. He doesn't like the grin on his sensei's face.

"Uh, isn't it because we didn't capture Cementoss-sensei or escape?" Kirishima says, glancing at Satou as he does. Satou shrugs, just the tiniest bit, and Aizawa sighs, shaking his head.

"In you and Satou's case, Kirishima, it's because you both failed to recognize and work around your limits. Both of your quirks have an exhaustion point, but Cementoss's doesn't. You both knew this, yet you still tried to fight a battle of attrition against him." Aizawa folds his arms over his chest, stares Kirishima down. "From your answers on the written portion of the heroics exam, it's clear that you understand that heroes have to be creative and have to work around their limits, but you didn't even make an effort to do so on the practical. *That's* why you failed." Izuku swallows, watches Kirishima rub the back of his neck in embarrassment. Satou is slightly red next to him, staring at the wooden surface of his desk like it might absorb him

Monoma giggles. "So *stupid*. It really is true that 1-A is inferior to 1-B." He leans back in his chair, propping his elbow up on the back of it and his chin on his fist, grinning at Kirishima and Satou with half lidded eyes. Aizawa sighs.

"Monoma, you're in no position to talk," he says, tapping his fingers on the outside of his folded arms like he's bored. "Do you know why you failed *your* final?"

Monoma huffs, rolling his eyes. "Because it was biased against me?" Aizawa narrows his eyes, unblinking.

“No,” he says, slowly, like Monoma is stupid. “Because you saw an unfavorable situation for you and let your partner do all of the work.”

Monoma raises an eyebrow. “Aren’t heroes supposed to work as a team, or whatever? I was under the impression that was the whole *point* of pairing us up for the finals.” Aizawa sighs.

“It was *part* of it, and heroes *are* supposed to work together, but making the snap decision that you won’t be useful and relying entirely on your teammate isn’t a good use of your time, especially considering that you *could* have been useful in that fight,” Aizawa says, his voice thick with irritation. Monoma just shrugs.

“Whatever. I wasn’t the only one who failed for being deadweight though, was I?” he asks, eyes sliding over to look at Izuku. Aizawa shakes his head.

“Midoriya didn’t fail for the same reason you did,” he says, his eyes moving to look at Izuku. “Tell us why you failed, Midoriya.”

Izuku swallows. “Um, i-it was because I was too reckless, right?” He fidgets with the end of his long sleeved t-shirt. There’s something odd about being in a classroom without his uniform, even if it is a remedial lesson at a training camp.

Aizawa nods. “While reckless may be an understatement,” he drawls. “Yes. Midoriya failed for almost the exact opposite reason as you, Monoma.”

Monoma rolls his eyes, leaning back in his seat and sighing a breath of air that blows a piece of his blonde hair off of his face. “He still failed,” he says, petulantly. Aizawa just nods, ever so slightly.

“You all failed,” he says, glancing across the room. “But that’s fine. The point of the first term final exam is less to assess your progress and more to push you to address a specific weakness we’ve noted in your development,” Aizawa says, voice calm and clear. “The matchups and scoring system were designed to pass you if you overcame that weakness or demonstrated that it wasn’t actually as big of a problem as we thought in the first place. Therefore, failing the exam is less of a failure on your part and more of an indicator that we as teachers have more work to do.” He tilts his head slightly to the side, a small smirk on his lips. “In many ways, calling it an exam at all is a logical ruse.”

“Now,” he says, turning to the blackboard on the back wall and picking up a piece of chalk. “The remedial lessons aren’t a punishment. My job here is to work you through the weaknesses that resulted in your failure to pass the exam in the first place,” Aizawa writes each of their names in a row across the top of the board, with lots of room underneath. “We’ll be doing a few different things in here, but for tonight, I want to talk in detail about what each of your weaknesses are and how you can work to overcome them.”

Monoma groans. “God, is this what 1-A does all of the time? No wonder you’re all so annoying.” Aizawa glares at him.

“We can start with you, then, Monoma,” he says. “You were paired with Tokage and Vlad King.” He tips his head slightly. “Earlier, you said that the exam was biased against you. What makes you think that?”

Monoma squints at him. “Are you stupid?” he asks. “I can’t copy either of their quirks safely,” he says, folding his arms over his chest, a mirror of Aizawa’s stance. “But you knew that already.”

Aizawa nods. “I did.” His gaze moves to the side. “Explain your quirk and why you couldn’t use it

in that situation,” he says. Monoma scowls.

“I don’t really *want* to give away how my quirk works to these losers,” Monoma says, but he keeps talking. “I can copy others’ quirks for up to five minutes after touching them, and right now I can hold three quirks at a time. Tokage’s quirk lets her split herself into pieces and move them around. Vlad-sensei can control his blood and harden it at will.” Monoma sighs. “So, if I was actively using either of those powers when my time ran out, I’d either be in literal pieces or have a large amount of my blood outside of my body. Not *great*, considering that I enjoy being alive.” Izuku blinks, considering that. He kind of wonders what it says about him that his first thought is that if he could, he’d give both a try. *I guess Monoma wouldn’t come back, though, so it’s different*.

“Right,” Aizawa says. “So, you sat on the sidelines and let Tokage capture Vlad King without helping.” Monoma rolls his eyes.

“Actually, I hid and kept myself out of danger so that Tokage didn’t have to worry about me,” he says, huffing. “Which I still think was the responsible thing to do.” Izuku notices that Monoma’s hands are squeezing his forearms tightly, like he’s grounding himself. Izuku wonders how much of the self-absorbed thing is an act.

“Kirishima,” Aizawa says, his eyes sliding over to the other boy. “What would you do in a situation like that?” Kirishima blinks.

“Uh. I’m guessing I don’t have my own quirk?” Kirishima replies, and Aizawa nods. “Okay. I guess that I’d try to listen to what my teammate said? I mean, if they *told* me to hide and wait it out, I’d honestly probably listen. I’d be pretty freaked if my quirk was gone.” Izuku ignores the pang of annoyance he feels at that. It’s not like Kirishima has any point of reference for what it’s like, so of *course* it’d be upsetting.

“Think of it less like you’re suddenly quirkless and more like you’re in a situation where your quirk doesn’t do any good,” Aizawa says. “Like in your battle with Cementoss. You both are harder to damage because of your quirks, but yours has a time limit and his doesn’t. His also allows for long ranged attacks, which you can’t do. The situation with Monoma was similar, and even though it was in different ways, you both handled a bad quirk matchup poorly.” Aizawa’s gaze shifts, landing on Izuku. “Midoriya. What do you think Monoma should have done?”

Izuku blinks. “Uh,” he says, intelligently. “It’s not like he couldn’t fight,” Izuku says, biting at his lower lip. “S-So he could just fight without a quirk.”

Aizawa nods. “Exactly. Vlad King is a better fighter than you in general, Monoma, but you knew he was wearing weights and you had a teammate whose quirk makes her adept at combat. You could have easily engaged Vlad in combat, helping to distract him and making the job easier for Tokage.” Aizawa sighs. “*That* would be relying on your teammate. What you did was give up.”

Monoma huffs out a breath of air. “Well, hindsight is 20/20, isn’t it?” he says, but Izuku can see that he’s looking to the side, not meeting Aizawa’s gaze, and that his body is slightly more tense than before. Aizawa nods.

“It is. Which is why we’ll be doing more than just talk about the exams. This is just the first task.” He glances over to Kirishima and Satou. “Now, let’s talk about you two. Satou, you’ve been quiet. Do you have any ideas about what you could have done?”

Satou purses his lips, shifting in his seat to sit up straighter. “Well, I shouldn’t have used my quirk as much as I did,” he says, frowning. “I knew I had a set limit, and I’m pretty strong even without it. Either way though, Cementoss-sensei is stronger than me, so I’m not exactly sure what I should

have done.” He sighs. “Just that what I did was wrong.”

“Strong doesn’t mean hard to escape,” Izuku blurts out before he can stop himself. “I-I mean, Cementoss-sensei is a bad matchup for pretty much *anyone* in hand-to-hand, and neither of you have long ranged attacks, s-so escaping was definitely the better choice for you.” He glances up to Aizawa, hoping he’s not in trouble for speaking out of turn, but Aizawa just nods.

“Exactly. But, how would they escape? As you’ve all pointed out, Cementoss had the distinct advantage in this fight. What should Satou and Kirishima have done?” Aizawa gaze switches to the left. “Monoma. You answer.”

Monoma shrugs. “I don’t know. It seems pretty obvious to me,” he says, his earlier discomfort at being scrutinized clearly gone. “Cementoss-sensei’s power blocks his line of sight. He can’t see through the concrete, so it’d be easy enough to stay hidden. And if I’m correct on your quirks,” he looks over to Kirishima and Satou, “you two should have been able to bust through any walls he made, if you saved your quirks for when necessary.”

“Oh wait, that’s genius!” Kirishima says, blinking. “Using his own quirk against him like that,” he leans back in his seat, facepalming. “Gahh, why didn’t we think of that?” Satou nods beside him, looking thoughtful, and Izuku *swears* he sees the smallest hint of a smile on Aizawa’s face, but when Izuku looks up properly, it’s gone.

“Thinking outside of the box is necessary, especially when your quirks don’t have a lot of flexibility,” Aizawa says. “Monoma is forced to do that constantly, because his quirk necessitates it. Midoriya as well, although for a different reason.” His gaze slides over to Midoriya. “What should *you* have done in your final?”

Izuku swallows. “I-I should have... been less reckless?” He gives Aizawa a smile, but Aizawa just stares back at him.

“Okay. And what would that have looked like?” Aizawa asks, face neutral. Izuku blinks, but it’s Kirishima who responds.

“Maybe next time don’t headbutt a gun, dude,” he says, laughter in his voice. “Kaminari told the whole Bakusquad about it, and then we watched the tapes. You were *feral*, man.” Satou nods in agreement, but Monoma makes a choking noise in his throat.

“You did *what*?” he asks, eyes wide and expression a mix of amused and incredulous. “Who on earth pulled a gun on you, anyway?”

“N-Nezu,” Izuku replies. “A-And I figured it wouldn’t have real bullets in it, so...” He shrugs, looking down at his desk and Aizawa starts to speak.

“It was loaded with rubber bullets,” Aizawa says, “which are still possibly deadly at short range. You headbutted the pistol and charged at Nezu with it pointed directly at your head.” Aizawa sighs. “I really hope I don’t have to elaborate on *why* exactly that was a bad idea.”

“Yeah,” Kirishima says, “you totally could have died, man.” He chuckles, nervously, and when Izuku looks up at him, he has a nervous look on his face.

Izuku blinks. “But I didn’t,” he points out. Monoma snorts.

“Yeah, because it was a test,” he says, and when Izuku glances over to him, he’s rolling his eyes. “Are you suicidal or something?” He phrases it as a joke, that sly smirk on his face, but Izuku doesn’t miss the way Aizawa’s eyes narrow slightly at the comment. Izuku shrugs.

“N-No, I just knew he wouldn’t hurt me,” Izuku argues weakly. “I wouldn’t have fought like that in a real battle.”

“Except you do,” Aizawa says, arching an eyebrow. “Both with the USJ and more recently.” Izuku knows, implicitly, that Aizawa means the battle with Stain. “So. I’ll ask again. How should Midoriya have handled a fight against Nezu, paired with Kaminari?” Izuku watches as Aizawa sweeps his gaze over the group.

“He should have relied more on his partner,” Monoma says. “Kaminari is the lightning guy, right? With Midoriya’s combat skill and Kaminari’s long ranged attacks, cornering and capturing Nezu should have been easy enough.” He sighs, rolling his eyes. “Honestly. You’d think you’d be a little smarter than that.”

“You’re one to talk,” Kirishima says. “Weren’t you the one who hid the whole time? Don’t make fun of Midoriya, he’s just doing his best.” Kirishima glares at Monoma, his lips set in a frown, and Izuku blinks, surprised.

“I-It’s okay, Kirishima,” Izuku says, raising his hands in a placating gesture. “I-I mean, Monoma’s right. I-I probably should have trusted Kaminari more, it’s just difficult to do that in the heat of things,” he says, reaching up to rub the back of his head. Aizawa, at the front of the room, nods.

“It is. Part of hero training is unlearning harmful instincts, like that one. It takes time,” Aizawa says, then yawns, the motion splitting his face. Izuku blinks, resisting the urge to yawn himself. “I think that’s enough for the time being, anyway. You’ve all had a long day. Go and help cook dinner, and think about what we’ve talked about. Tonight will be harder,” Aizawa grins.

Izuku smiles back, the edges of his lips twitching nervously as he gathers his things and gets ready to leave.

--

Izuku sighs, running his hands over the carrot he’s holding, the cool water of the tap spilling over his hands and helping him to rub the dirt off of the surface of the vegetable. When he thinks it’s clean, he sets it to the side, on a folded white towel that rests between him and Kacchan, who’s furiously chopping vegetables, his hand moving so quickly the knife looks like a blur. Even though Izuku still has more remedial training after dinner, he’s exhausted, his limbs slow and heavy as he grabs a potato and brings it under the stream of water, rubbing his thumb over the surface and brushing away the dirt.

“Wow,” Sero says, “Bakugou’s pretty good at cooking. It’s kind of surprising, right?” He chuckles, and Kaminari nods eagerly beside him.

“It really is! You’d think with all of the explodey-ness, he’d be bad at it,” Kaminari says, grinning wide. To Izuku’s right, Kacchan growls, low and irritated.

“Shut the fuck up,” he says, chopping faster. “I’m a damn good cook, and if you want any fucking food you’ll keep your mouths shut.” He glares down at the cutting board, the sound of the knife hitting the wooden surface filling the air. Izuku smiles.

“You know, his dad taught us both to cook,” Izuku says, looking up as he sets the potato down on the towel and reaches for another one. “Neither of us were very good at first, but Kacchan practiced a lot.” He smiles fondly at the memory, at the thought of a tiny Kacchan angrily cutting up cucumber while Izuku made the dressing, mixing the ingredients together and tasting it a little too much.

“Shut up, Deku,” Kacchan growls. Izuku just smiles, tipping his head to the side and looking at Sero and Kaminari.

“Kacchan got really serious about it, too. He’d stay up late every night cooking to practice, and the Bakugous had to keep inviting my mom and I over to help eat all of the extra food,” Izuku says, smiling fondly. “Kacchan would get really mad if we didn’t eat all--” Izuku’s cut off by Kacchan literally exploding next to him, stepping back from the cutting board just in time to avoid launching carrots into the air. His palms spark and crackle as he glares at Izuku.

“If you don’t shut your nerd mouth right now,” Kacchan growls, stepping forward, “I’m gonna blast your fucking head right off of your body.” Izuku giggles, stepping back slightly, still smiling even as Kacchan snarls at him.

“I wouldn’t, if I were you.” Todoroki’s voice startles Izuku, serious and dark behind him. “Midoriya isn’t doing anything wrong,” he says, voice firm.

Kacchan glares at him, lips curled up in a snarl. “This isn’t any of your fucking business, Icyhot. Fuck off,” he hisses, raising his hands and setting off little explosions in his palms threateningly. Izuku blinks, swallowing as Todoroki steps forward, standing slightly in front of Izuku. Izuku reaches out a hand and tugs gently on the sleeve of Todoroki’s shirt.

“Todoroki, it’s okay,” he says, quietly. “Kacchan isn’t going to hurt me.” Todoroki glances back at him, his face serious.

“He has before,” Todoroki points out, a whisper so quiet Izuku can barely hear it. He can feel the others’ gaze on the three of them, but he keeps his eyes on Todoroki.

“He has,” Izuku agrees with a small nod. “But he won’t now.” Todoroki holds his gaze for another beat, then turns and looks at Kacchan, his mismatched eyes still dark but relaxing ever so slightly.

“If you’re sure,” he says, before turning on his heels and walking away, like nothing happened. Kacchan’s eyes narrow, his lips turned down in a scowl as he watches Todoroki leave. Izuku grabs another potato and holds it under the water, washing it carefully.

“Ooooookay,” Sero says, laughing nervously. “That was weird. I’m not the only one who thought that was weird, right?” Kaminari nods beside him, miming a shiver.

“Todoroki was all cold and shit! Man, I didn’t know you were fighting with him, Bakugou,” Kaminari says, looking at Kacchan, who snorts.

“We’re not,” he says and steps back to the cutting board, resumes chopping the carrot. The sounds quickly fill the silence, and Izuku relaxes. Even if Kacchan wasn’t going to hurt him this time, there’s something nice about knowing that if he had, Todoroki would have stepped in.

--

It’s only once they’re all seated at the table, eating their homemade beef stew, that Izuku realizes someone’s missing. The table is full, loud and active, but when Izuku scans the crowd, looks around at the cooking area and at the pros where they sit, talking to each other and eating their own food, the sky already dark and the light from lamps and cooking fires illuminating the area, Izuku doesn’t see Kouta anywhere. He blinks, standing up from his seat.

“Deku?” Uraraka asks, glancing up from her bowl of stew. “Is everything alright?”

Izuku nods. “Yeah. I’m going to take some food to Kouta; he’s not here.” Uraraka blinks, glancing

around.

“Oh, you’re right,” she says, sounding surprised. “That’s a good idea, then. Do you know where he went?” She stands up, too, and Izuku shakes his head.

“No, but I have an idea,” he replies, giving her a smile. “You can stay here! I’ll only be gone a moment.” Uraraka nods, sitting back down.

“I hope he’s feeling alright,” she says, pressing a hand to her cheek. “It’s probably a lot, for a little kid who’s been through so much.” She sighs. “Good luck!” She gives him a smile, which Izuku returns.

“Thanks!” He gives her a small wave as he turns, headed to where he remembers seeing Kouta last. It doesn’t take him long to find a set of small, child-sized footprints in the dusty ground, the top layer of dirt scuffed up from all of the training they’d done earlier. It makes it easy to follow the tracks, makes it easy for Izuku to head out of the lit area and into the nighttime, the dirt path he follows lit by the moon and stars. The dirt that he knows is red-orange looks almost violet in the light cast by the navy-dark sky, and as Izuku’s eyes adjust to the darkness, he can see the gently swaying leaves on the trees that border the path. It’s not quiet, not like he’d thought it would be. He can hear the sounds of laughter and conversation from the camp, can hear crickets and cicadas and birds in the first, can hear soft wind rippling through trees, pressing leaves into leaves in a cascading whisper. It’s soothing, much like the soft sounds of the city.

When Izuku steps up to the top of the ridge, where it overlooks the forest, he sees Kouta, crouched on the ground with his back pressed to the stone cliff face behind him. He’s got his knees pulled up to his chest and his arms wrapped around him, but he picks his head up to glare at Izuku as he approaches. Izuku gives him a little wave.

“Go away,” Kouta says, dropping his head back down to his knees, his chin resting on top of them. His head is propped up so that he’s looking out onto the forest. Izuku steps over to stand closer to him, then sits next to him on the ground. Kouta huffs out a breath of air, irritated, as Izuku sets a bowl of beef stew in front of him.

“I noticed you didn’t get anything to eat, so I brought you this,” Izuku says, giving him a soft smile. Kouta rolls his eyes.

“I said go away,” he says, voice a mumble. “I’m not hungry.” Izuku doesn’t get up, instead leaning back on the palms of his hands and tilting his head back to look up at the stars. “This is my secret base. You’re not welcome here.”

“Your secret base, huh?” Izuku murmurs. Kouta snorts.

“Don’t you get tired of them?” Kouta asks, voice petulant. “Flaunting their stupid, flashy quirks. I hate it.” Izuku sighs, shrugging, and out of the corner of his eye, he sees Kouta turn to look at him.

“I mean, it’s tiring sometimes, yeah,” Izuku says. “Since I don’t have a quirk, it kind of sucks that it’s the most important thing to so many people, you know?” He pauses, something connecting in his mind. “Your parents, they were heroes, right?”

“Did that stupid Mandalay tell you that?” Kouta asks, voice thick with irritation. “I don’t need you hero types up in my business. I can handle myself.”

“Mandalay didn’t tell me anything,” Izuku says, and Kouta shrugs.

“Either way. I don’t like you and I don’t like your friends. Everyone calls themselves heroes or

villains, but all they do is hurt people. It's stupid and all it does is leave people behind." Kouta's arms tighten around his knees. "If you'd all just stop being idiots, you wouldn't end up like that."

"End up dead, you mean," Izuku says, quietly, and Kouta's head snaps over to look at him. "It's not just quirks that do that, you know."

"What do you know?!" Kouta asks, voice almost a shout. "I don't want to hear anything you have to say. You don't understand anything!"

"I've seen people die," Izuku says, quietly. "Both because of quirks and because of other things-- weapons." He sighs. "I think people would be trying to kill each other even without quirks. Some people are just... bad. And other people are driven to stop the bad guys. It's those people, those good people, that get hurt, but it's the people around them that pay the price." Izuku thinks about Aizawa's dead body, at USJ. The dead civilians from way back, when he'd fought the porcupine villain. Iida, against Stain and Manami. He thinks about the way Aizawa's face twisted up in pain when he told Ace about his dead friend. The way Iida is still trying to move on from his brother's injuries.

"Whatever," Kouta says. "Leave me alone. You can say whatever you want, but you don't understand." His voice is choked with tears. Izuku stands.

"You're right," he says softly. "I can't understand what you've been through. Good night, Kouta." He turns, starting to walk back down the path, away from the ridge and the cave. He doesn't hear Kouta say anything, but he wasn't expecting him to.

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The next morning, Izuku is really, really starting to hate the concept of remedial training. Once they'd been released to go to bed, it had already been plenty late as is, but bathing and changing had eaten up a few more precious minutes of sleep, and to top it off, Izuku had had strange dreams all night, dreams of the forest and hot springs, empty, except for him. Silent, except for his breath.

The fact that there's sound now is nice, in theory, but now that he's standing in front of Monoma, who looks at *least* as tired as he does, it's kind of giving him a headache.

"Do you have them?" Izuku asks, resisting the urge to yawn. He wonders if he has bags under his eyes, like the dark smudges under Monoma's blue ones. Monoma nods.

"Yeah, yeah, I copied a few. Let's just get this over with," he says, lips pressed into a frown. It's a stark contrast to yesterday, when Monoma had acted overconfident, sure of himself. Izuku honestly can't remember if he fought Monoma with or without resetting in the sports festival, but from the way he'd acted, Izuku would have to guess no. After getting punched in the face a few times, though, Monoma had stopped acting better than him, at least while they were fighting.

Izuku drops into a fighting stance, whipping a leg out to sweep at Monoma's feet, trying to knock him over. He hisses in pain when Monoma takes the hit, his leg turning into something hard and metallic, bruising Izuku's leg. Izuku doesn't stop, though, instead hooking his leg behind Monoma's hardened one and using the motion to pull himself forward, aiming an elbow strike at Monoma's chest. Predictably, Monoma turns his sternum to steel, but Izuku knows to pull back his strength, now. Monoma grins.

"Oh, I like this one a lot," he says, stepping back just as Izuku throws a punch. "Tetsutetsu's is harder to use than Kirishima's though."

“Really?” Izuku asks, but it comes out as more of a grunt as he raises both arms to block an enlarged punch from Monoma, the boy’s fist growing to about the size of his head.

“Yeah,” Monoma says, twisting out of the way of a kick that Izuku doesn’t really want to hit, not considering that Monoma’s arm is already turning to steel, his hand back to its usual size. “You know, when these run out, you should let me try and copy your quirk,” Monoma says, stepping back and gritting his teeth. Izuku hisses in surprise as his body moves back, jerking slightly before stopping.

“Who’s was that?” Izuku asks, stepping back as Monoma gives himself a shake, blinking as if in pain.

“Yanagi,” he says. “You must be over her weight limit.” Monoma straightens up. “Would have been nice to know it gives you a headrush when you try something heavier.”

Izuku hums, stepping in to kick at Monoma again. The strike connects, but there’s not much weight behind it. Monoma glares at him.

“So, can I?” Monoma asks, and Izuku punches him in the jaw just for that. Monoma’s head snaps back, his eyes squeezing shut for just a second.

“No,” Izuku says. “I’ve told you a couple of times, and the answer hasn’t changed. I don’t want to know and I don’t want *you* to know,” he says, blocking a steel punch Monoma throws with a wince as it connects with his forearm, rattling the bone there.

“I don’t get why you wouldn’t want to know,” Monoma answers, rolling his eyes. “Like, wouldn’t it be nice? To know? I might even be able to figure out what it does, since I know what it feels like *not* to have it.” Izuku shakes his head.

“I don’t want to know, because either way it’s not something *I* can use,” he says, not for the first time. “What does it feel like, anyway? Having a quirk?” Izuku slides back to get some distance, then steps forward and pivots to throw a back kick at Monoma, one that sends Monoma sliding back a short way, even though he blocks. It feels nice, to have that kind of strength. Izuku still isn’t used to it.

“Hmm,” Monoma’s face twists slightly, “It’s different for each quirk. For mine, it’s like... pulling,” he says, stepping forward and throwing a half-hearted punch. “When I touch someone, I can pull. And if I do, I have their quirk.”

“So it’s not automatic?” Izuku asks, and Monoma shakes his head.

“I do it on accident, sometimes, like a reflex,” he says. “I don’t use others’ by accident, usually, unless they’re really hard to control, but if someone startles me with touch, I usually use copy by mistake. It’s like turning your head when you hear your name,” Monoma says, hissing as Izuku lands a kick on his side. “You *can* resist, and it’s not automatic, necessarily, because you learned to do it, but it’s going to happen if you don’t stop it.”

Izuku blinks. “That makes sense,” he says. “You’re really smart, Monoma,” he says, smiling as he throws an elbow strike out at him. Monoma blocks it, throwing his own punch in retaliation.

“Of course I am,” Monoma says, rolling his eyes. “I’m in class 1-B. The dumbest one of us is smarter than the smartest one of you.” Izuku snorts, kneeling him in the gut. Monoma grunts, glaring at him.

“Looks like I’m still better at combat, though,” Izuku says, giving Monoma a smile and stepping

back as Monoma straightens up, rolling his eyes.

“Whatever. I’m going to go get another set of quirks,” he says, turning and starting to walk away. Izuku blinks, glancing up at the clock Aizawa had propped up against a table not far away from them.

“Hey, Monoma!” he calls. Monoma pauses, turning to look over his shoulder.

“What?” he asks, sighing. Izuku smiles.

“That was more than five minutes!” He says. “It was almost six!” Monoma blinks at him, then turns and starts to walk away.

“Of course it was,” he says. “Obviously I’d improve from training like this,” he replies, waving a hand, but Izuku thinks he can hear a pleased tone to his voice.

Chapter End Notes

cw: none i think

ily guys sm the support is AMAIZNG and it keeps me going <3 <3 yall are so pog

discord: <https://discord.gg/Vqaj62ceCt>

summer camp, part 3

Chapter Summary

last time: izuku gets bonked in remedial lessons, todoroki does a protect, and monoma drops some character development

Chapter Notes

hey guys!!! please be careful with this one. check the content warning in the end notes and be safe

ALSO 2k KUDOS AND 200k WORDS !!!! HOLY SHIT

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Izuku's having an awfully hard time staying awake during the remedial classes that evening. He's pretty sure it's a mix of being drained from fighting Monoma all day long and not sleeping much at night, but he'd kind of hoped that he and the other remedial kids would be allowed to participate in the test of courage. Instead, they were back in the annex classroom, going over how to develop plans in a crisis, appear unconcerned to civilians, and not show weakness to villains, all at once. Izuku sighs, resting his cheek on the palm of his hand.

"Midoriya," Aizawa says, his eyes narrowing. "Don't fall asleep." Izuku sits up straight, taking a deep breath as Aizawa turns back to the board, where there's a list of different techniques they're supposed to learn to use to control their instincts. The words are familiar enough to Izuku, things like *square breathing* and *invoke the five senses* and *approach the situation logically*. Izuku knows how to do all of those things from his training with Aizawa, he just doesn't find them all that helpful.

"Aizawa," Vlad King's voice startles Izuku just a little bit, and he sits up and turns to see the class 1-B homeroom teacher step into the room. "Are you okay with them doing some practical exercises today? I remember you'd mentioned them last night, and I have some free time now."

Aizawa nods. "Now is a good time. They're not paying attention to what I'm saying, anyway." His eyes slip over to Izuku, who feels his face heating up just the slightest bit, knowing he's caught. Aizawa sighs, stepping away from the white board and running a hand through his hair, before they *all* freeze.

"**Everyone**," a voice in their heads says, loud and clear. Izuku blinks, tensing up in his seat.

"It's Mandalay's quirk," Kirishima says, tipping his head back to look up at the ceiling, like it's an intercom announcement. Aizawa shushes him, his brows furrowing. Izuku clenches his jaw tight.

"**Two villains have invaded. There are likely more,**" she says, booming through their minds. Izuku hears a soft gasp from one of the other students, but he's not sure who. "**If you are able to do so safely, get to the building immediately. If you encounter an enemy, do not engage. I**

repeat, do not engage. Continue your retreat. ” Mandalay’s voice is firm and calm, unwavering. Aizawa had *just* been telling them about that, about how to communicate in a crisis, about how to be reassuring yet firm. Izuku grits his teeth, watching as Aizawa grimaces, turning to Vlad King.

“Kan, you keep an eye on things here,” he says. “I’m going.” He whips around as soon as Vlad King nods, his expression grim. Izuku watches Aizawa storm out of the building, all dark hair and pale capture scarf, and Izuku finds himself squeezing his hands into fists.

“How did the villains find us here?” Monoma asks, his voice shaky. Izuku turns to see him staring at Vlad King, eyes wide. “I thought it was supposed to be secret. Foolproof.” His hands are shaking, Izuku notes. Vlad King meets his student’s gaze, his expression calm but serious.

“I don’t know how they found us, Monoma, but we’ll be okay,” he says. “You’re safe here.” His eyes ghost over Izuku, Kirishima, and Satou. “All of you.” Izuku nods, more so that the other kids can see it than because he actually believes it. *Look assured, even if you aren’t. Be honest, but not brutally so. Hide your emotions, but not the reality of the situation* . Izuku is thinking that last lesson was a little too on the nose.

There’s the sound of a shout outside, a wave of crackling blue light that shines too bright through the windows, and Izuku blinks, trying to push the sunspots out of his vision. Vlad moves quickly to the door, standing in front of it protectively, but Izuku hears the fire, *feels* the heat, and he knows it’s not going to be enough. He has the sense to tense up and squeeze his eyes shut as a blast, loud and painful in his ears, rocks the room. Izuku grits his teeth, holding his hands in front of his face and hissing as he hears the sound of glass shattering, of fire crackling and popping.

When Izuku opens his eyes, when the air clears, he sees Vlad, slamming a wave of thick, glossy blood into a villain with scarred skin and dark hair. Izuku blinks, because that’s *Dabi* , the villain he’d seen as Ace not long ago. The room is lit in neon blue fire as Vlad King’s blood crystallizes and hardens around the villain, and Izuku is already moving, running and turning his head back.

“Vlad-sensei, we’re getting out of the fire!” He shouts, then looks at Kirishima and Satou, who follow him immediately. “Monoma,” Izuku calls. “We have to get out of here. Vlad-sensei can’t fight as well if he has to protect us,” he explains. Monoma blinks, glancing at his teacher, who grunts and slams his elbow into Dabi’s skull.

“Go,” he says. “But not far.” His voice is strained, slightly, but it’s enough for Izuku to turn and run, his feet pounding against the ground as he runs from the burning building, from the bright flames that lick at his skin. It’s when he steps out onto the ground, when he sees the red dirt turned violet from the blue of the fire that it occurs to him.

“Kouta,” he breathes, his eyes widening as he whips his head back to look at the others. Kirishima and Satou burst out of the building, with Monoma fast on their trail. Izuku swallows.

“I have to go,” he says. “Kouta--the kid--I want to make sure he’s safe,” he sputters out, turning and moving toward the ridge he’d walked up earlier, the path he’d followed to bring Kouta his dinner. It’s brighter, now, but only because the forest is on fire, glowing blue. It casts an eerie glow over the ground, painting everything in pale, cool tones. Izuku hears the footsteps behind him before he hears the words.

“You can’t just go off alone,” Monoma snaps as he runs after him. “You really are as reckless and stupid as they say.” Izuku glances to the side, sees Monoma’s face, drawn with worry and irritation. Izuku swallows.

“Okay,” he says. “But I need to go and get Kouta. He was out here, at his secret hideout.” He

gestures with one hand at the space in front of them, where the path they're following curves gently. Izuku sees Monoma about to reply, his mouth open ever so slightly, when they turn the corner.

Izuku sees Kouta, first. He's lying on the ground, on his side, almost in the fetal position except his left wrist is clearly broken, twisted and swollen and bruised nearly black. His head is covered in thick, dark blood, half-dried and glistening, reflecting the light of the fire that burns in the forest around them. Izuku thinks the worst part might be his eyes--not just the way they're open, either. Kouta's eyes are open, shiny and wet, but there's dirt in them, red dust clinging to the whites of his eyes, and there's blood, too, blood that's run from above his hairline, through his dark eyebrow and into his right eye, the one that's on top with how he's angled. His eyes are open, dirty, bloody, and he isn't blinking.

It's that, that tells Izuku he's dead, even more than the way there's too much blood staining the ground ahead, the way Kouta's neck is at a strange angle, the way he isn't breathing. It's just his eyes, unmoving and unblinking, dirtied and dull, that give it away for Izuku. Izuku thinks he might be sick, but he doesn't have time to be, not when Monoma gasps a sharp breath of air next to him, not when a huge, hulking figure of a man steps forward from the shadows ahead of them, a wide, evil grin in his face. He moves slowly, confidently, until he's standing over Kouta. He looks down at the body, grins wider, then takes another step forward. There's a crunching noise, and Kouta's body bends, twists, but what makes bile rise in Izuku's throat is the way Kouta doesn't even twitch, even when his ribs are being crushed.

Izuku raises a hand to press to his mouth, feeling his breaths come quick and uneven, but he still moves without thinking, stepping to stand between Monoma and the villain. He looks up at the villain, a tall, blonde man with muscles that show clearly on his bare skin. His left eye is marred by a scar, a deep red cut that goes from his forehead to his jaw, leaving his eye exposed and unnatural looking. Izuku bends into a fighting stance, even as the wind whips around them, brushing blue embers and grey soot through the air.

"Well well well," the villain says, eyes narrowing. "What do we have here? Another two playthings?" He steps forward, flexing his arm, and red swirls of muscle bulge unnaturally from the skin. *His quirk*, Izuku thinks.

"Midoriya," Monoma whispers from behind him. "We have to run," he says, voice shaky. Izuku takes a deep breath, nods.

"You go," he says, quiet. "I'll distract him." The villain arches his eyebrow.

"I can hear you, you know," the villain says, chuckling. "And I'm not gonna let you go. You're Midoriya and Monoma, right?" He tips his head to the side. "I've got orders to kill one of you and capture the other, so it looks like I'm in for a good time." He steps forward, swinging out with a punch that Izuku dodges by just a breath.

"Which one is which?" Izuku asks. "Who are you after?" His blood rushes in his ears, and he realizes he's *unarmed*. There'd been no reason to have knives in the remedial lesson, after all.

"I'm supposed to capture Monoma and some kid named Bakugou. Shigaraki wanted you dead, and I'm happy to oblige," the villain says, an unconcerned look on his face as he rushes forward, his arm growing and twisting with fibers of pink and red as he throws a punch, this one far too fast for Izuku to possibly evade. It slams him back, sends a burst of pain through his ribs and throws him back. Izuku feels Monoma's hands on his shoulders, steadying him, and he only has time to glance up before there's another fist slamming into him, crushing them both into the ground.

Izuku's vision goes white around the edges as his head bounces off the ground, sending a blinding flash of pain through his skull. He can feel that Monoma is underneath him, breathing hard and fast, and Izuku recognizes, dully, the sensation of bleeding. He picks his head up to look down at himself, though, and he doesn't see blood, only that his ribcage is *wrong*, bent and smashed and hurt. He blinks rapidly, trying to clear his vision, trying to force himself upright, but all he can manage is rolling onto his side, off of Monoma.

"Monoma," he gasps, squeezing his eyes shut and coughing. "R-Run," he says. He tastes blood in his mouth, feels the way his left side won't seem to inflate, even when he tries to suck air in with all of his might. When he opens his eyes, his vision is blurring, warping.

"C-Can't," Monoma says, voice broken and weak. "My... my spine," he says, gasping between each word, and that's when Izuku turns his head, ignoring the flash of pain that sends through his temples, and he sees Monoma, really sees him. He can't see the worst injury, can't see what's really wrong, but he *can* see the way Monoma's face is too pale, the way his chest is barely rising and falling. He can see that way Monoma is blinking and biting at his lip, the way his hands are scrabbling at the ground, digging into the packed dirt, the way his shoulders are shaking, the way every part of him, from the waist up, is constant movement, frantic and desperate. Izuku can also see the way that Monoma's legs aren't moving at all, lying still and limp on the ground. Monoma wheezes as he breathes, and Izuku crawls forward, turning the motion into a lunge as he sees the villain grabbing for Monoma.

Izuku feels the villain try to swat him aside, but he throws himself over Monoma, clinging to the other boy's t-shirt and guarding him with his body. Izuku can't see, because he's face down and his eyes are clenched shut so that he doesn't have to see the way his vision's started to go, but he feels the way the villain slams a foot down on top of him, crushing him down into Monoma. Izuku does his best to hold himself off of the other boy, to keep him safe from the worst of it, but he can feel the blood rising in his throat with each breath, can feel the familiar dull euphoria that comes with bleeding out, even though he has no visible injuries. He feels the way Monoma's breathing is *wrong* the way his chest is fluttering below him, different from the way people breathe when they're panicking. He can feel Monoma's hands come up to clutch at the collar of Izuku's shirt, fingers bloody from scraping in the dirt, grabbing at Izuku like he's the only thing keeping Monoma in this world.

"I-It's okay," Izuku gasps out, forcing his eyes open to look down at Monoma. Monoma's face is *wrong*, his lips a grey-blue that can't be from the firelight alone, his eyes bloodshot and twitching oddly. He gasps, little weak breaths that do nothing, and Izuku winces as the villain laughs from above them.

"Oops," the man says, although he doesn't sound that upset. "It's whatever. *My* boss wanted Bakugou, anyway. I'll just tell them I had no choice but to kill both of you brats." Izuku braces himself, tenses the shaking muscles in his back, and he forces himself to make eye contact with Monoma, who looks distant, like he can't hear what the villain's saying, like his blue eyes can't even see Izuku right in front of him.

"It's okay, Monoma," Izuku whispers. "We'll come back. I can fix this." The words leave his mouth, and moments later, he feels an impact that strikes the back of his head, hard. He doesn't feel anything, after that.

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Izuku opens his eyes, and it's only because he's done this so many times before that he doesn't gasp, doesn't whimper or shout. He blinks, rapidly, clearing his vision, and the second he does, he

turns at the sound of someone retching. Monoma is bent over in his chair, gasping with both hands buried in his hair, his eyes open wide. He's shaking, his breaths coming too fast and too quick, and the only thing Izuku can think is a very empathetic *fuck*.

"Monoma?" Aizawa is moving forward in an instant, crouching at Monoma's side. "What's going on?" He reaches out a hand, maybe to check Monoma's temperature or to uncurl his hands from his hair, where they're tugging too hard, but Monoma flinches back, throwing himself away from Aizawa and out of the chair, eyes wild.

"M-M-Midoriya--" Monoma chokes out, shaking his head, swallowing visibly. "Y-You, your quirk, it--" he stops, cutting himself off with a heavy sob, and Izuku stands up.

"You copied my quirk?" he asks, blinking, walking over to him. He does his best to look confused, for Aizawa, who's watching them both with furrowed brows and concern clear on his face, even though Izuku knows, without a doubt that Monoma copied it.

"Y-You..." Monoma sobs, digging his fingers into his scalp and shutting his eyes, open to open them again quickly, like he didn't like what he'd seen. Izuku steps forward, crouching in front of Monoma, like Aizawa had before, except when Izuku reaches out, setting a hand on Monoma's knee and squeezing, Monoma only flinches a little bit, his eyes dropping to stare at his legs.

"You can feel that, right?" Izuku whispers. He reaches out, pulling Monoma into a tight hug, his arms wrapping around the other boy's back and his mouth next to his ear, where he whispers, as softly as possible. "My quirk takes me back in time when I die. Neither of us is hurt. You need to calm down. Take deep breaths, okay?" He feels Monoma nod, shaky, feels the other boy's arms drop from his head to clutch at the front of Izuku's shirt, like they had just before they died.

"G-God," Monoma whispers into his ear, his breathing still shaky, but slightly slower. "W-What the *fuck*, Midoriya?" he asks, a wet laugh bubbling up in his throat.

"You can't tell anyone about my quirk," Izuku whispers. "I need to get out of here, quickly, to save Kouta." Monoma nods into his shoulder, and Izuku pulls back, gently. Monoma unlatches from the front of Izuku's shirt and wipes at his eyes, red-rimmed and wet, with the back of his hand. Izuku sits back on his heels, then turns his head to the side.

"Better?" he asks, at normal volume. "I wish you hadn't copied it, you know. I didn't want to know if I had one." Monoma meets his eyes, a silent agreement passing between them.

"Yeah, well, I wish I hadn't, either," Monoma says, rolling his eyes and lurching to his feet. "You'd think you'd know you had one, if it hurts that badly just having it." Izuku stands, too, and near them, Aizawa rises as well, a deep furrow to his brow.

"What do you mean?" Izuku asks. "It doesn't hurt me," he says. "I didn't even know it was *there*."

Monoma shrugs, dusting off the front of his sweats with his hands. "Maybe you're just used to it, I don't know," he says, sighing, and Izuku is struck by just how good of an actor Monoma can be. Izuku stands up, too, but doesn't return to his seat.

"Explain," Aizawa orders, his eyes narrowed at the two of them. "What happened?"

"I copied this idiot's quirk," Monoma says, jerking a thumb over at him, "by mistake, and turns out not only does he have one, but it feels *awful*." He shrugs. "Not the first time a quirk has felt wrong, but it's got to be the worst one yet." Aizawa raises an eyebrow.

"You didn't touch him," he says, voice even. "You have to touch someone to copy their quirk."

Monoma shrugs. "I must have," he says, voice light even though his eyes are still rimmed red and there's a small pool of his vomit on the floor. "I didn't intend to, believe me." He makes a disgusted face. "And I am *never* doing that again. I don't know how Midoriya stands it." His eyes dart over to Izuku's and Izuku gets it. *He doesn't understand how I've kept it secret* .

"Wait, what's his quirk, then?" Kirishima asks from his seat next to Satou's. "I thought he was quirkless."

Izuku bites at his lip. "I-I don't have the toe joint," he explains, "but I never manifested one, so I'm legally quirkless, but I *probably* have a latent quirk that just won't ever show up." He laughs, nervously, and rubs the back of his head. "Well, I guess I know for sure that I have one, now." The door opens, and when Izuku turns, surprised, he sees Vlad King. The man looks the room over, one brow raising.

"What happened?" he asks, his gaze catching on the way Aizawa, Monoma, and Izuku are all standing up, then the pool of vomit on the floor. "Is everything okay?"

"That's what I'm trying to find out," Aizawa says, eyes narrowed at Izuku. "Monoma apparently copied Midoriya's quirk, which resulted in him having a panic attack, and now they're both hiding something." Izuku swallows, but he knows they won't have to keep this up much longer, because--

"**Everyone!**" Mandalay's quirk fills his head, and this time, Izuku can see everyone but him and Monoma start slightly.

"That's Mandalay's quirk," Kirishima says and tilts his head back, just like before.

"**Two villains have invaded. There are likely more,**" she says, voice clear and familiar. Izuku has a sinking feeling he'll be hearing this a few more times. "**If you are able to do so safely, get to the building immediately. If you encounter an enemy, do not engage. I repeat, do not engage. Continue your retreat.**" Izuku glances at Monoma, who doesn't nod, instead blinking slowly, intentionally. Izuku can see out of the corner of his eye as Aizawa grimaces, turning to Vlad King.

"We can figure out whatever *that* was later," he says, gesturing to Izuku and Monoma. "You watch things here, and I'll go and help the other students." Vlad King nods, and Aizawa is off, running with his capture weapon fluttering at his neck. Izuku swallows.

"Vlad-sensei," he says, and Vlad turns to him, frowning. "I need to go check on something. I think Kouta is still outside, at his secret base. I know where it is, from when I brought him dinner." Vlad's eyes widen ever so slightly.

"Damn," Vlad King says, shaking his head. "Okay. You go and alert Mandalay, so that she can get the word out for one of us pros to go and get him." He frowns. "Take someone with you, and come straight back here."

"I'll go," Monoma says. "I've been sparring with him for the past few days, so if we get into trouble, we'll fight well together," he says, making eye contact with his teacher, who raises an eyebrow.

"I don't know what's going on with you two," he says, his gaze darting over to Izuku, "but do *not* fight, unless you have no other choice." He sighs, shaking his head. "I'll allow it, but only because there's a kid out there. Any other situation, and you'd be staying right here, do you understand?" He bites his lip. "Damn. I *really* wish there was cell service out here." Izuku looks to Monoma, nods.

“We’ll be quick,” Izuku says, and then they’re going, jogs forward and through the door.

“Be careful!” Vlad shouts from inside, and Izuku and Monoma push their way out of the door just in time to see Aizawa hiss and activate his quirk on Dabi, not even looking back at the students.

“What are you *doing* ?” Aizawa growls. “Get back inside.” He whips out his capture weapon, dragging Dabi to the ground. The villain grunts as the air is knocked out of him.

“Kouta is still out here,” Izuku says, still running. “We’re going to make sure he’s safe. Vlad King-sensei said it was alright.”

“Midoriya, don’t--” Aizawa shouts, but he cuts himself off. Izuku glances back to see him kicking Dabi back to the ground; the villain must have tried to get up. Izuku turns his head back to face forward and keeps running, Monoma keeping pace at his side. It’s only when they’re a good way away from Aizawa and Dabi that Monoma asks the question Izuku’s been expecting.

“Midoriya,” Monoma says, voice almost a growl. “What the *fuck* is your quirk?”

Izuku chuckles nervously. “Uh. When I die, I go back in time a little?” He swallows. “I’m not totally sure how it works. I didn’t expect you to remember, when we died.”

“Yeah, me neither,” Monoma says, voice sarcastic. “So, does time just go back, or do you jump timelines? And is it just when you die?”

“I-I don’t actually know?” Izuku says, his feet pounding against the hard-packed earth beneath their feet, the forest ablaze in blue around them. “I-I mean, it’s only ever activated when I die, so I know that at least, but I don’t know how it works, really. I don’t get to pick where I go back to or anything, either.”

“How long have you had it, anyway?” Monoma asks, throwing a glance at Izuku.

“Since this February,” Izuku says in reply, biting at his lower lip. “Well, that’s when I died for the first time, anyway.”

“Jesus,” Monoma says, shaking his head. “I knew you 1-A freaks were crazy, but this is another level.” He sighs, the sound of it sharp. “Well, I’m glad that you have it. Would have been one shitty way to go.”

Izuku snorts. “Yeah. It’s definitely one of the worst.” He swallows. “You remember everything?”

“I think so,” Monoma says. “It was really fuzzy at the end, there, but I’d actually like to remember a little less of the choking to death part.”

Izuku nods. “People have remembered... pieces, before, if I was touching them when I died. Well, just one person, actually.”

“Who?” Monoma asks, just before they turn the corner. This is where they’d seen the body, last time. Izuku can only hope they’re not too late.

“Todoroki,” Izuku says, because there’s not much point in hiding it, not if Monoma already knows about the quirk. He does lower his voice, though, and he’s glad he did when they turn the corner and Izuku sees the form of the villain, towering over Kouta where the boy is on his ass on the ground, his hands pressed into the dirt behind him to hold him up and his eyes wet with tears that haven’t spilled out yet, but will soon. The villain glances up as Izuku and Monoma run into the area, his eyes lighting up.

“Oh hoh, what’s this?” He tips his head slightly to the side. “Two new playthings?”

“We’re here to save you, Kouta,” Izuku says, ignoring the villain. “I’m sorry it took us this long, but we’re here now. You’re going to be just fine.”

The villain laughs. “What are you, stupid? You two, save him?” He points at the kid. “Haven’t you heard of me? The villain, Muscular. I’m kind of a big deal,” he chuckles under his breath. “I guess I’ll take the kid out first, then. I’m pretty sure one of you is on the target list and the other is on the hit list, so,” he says, grinning wide. Izuku glances to Monoma, who’s gone slightly pale, the scowl on his lips a little too deep. Izuku hates that he can’t do anything to help, but Monoma could have stayed back, if he wanted to.

“Don’t touch him,” Izuku grits out, and he and Muscular move at the same time, both lunging for Kouta. Izuku has the advantage of knowing what to expect, though, and even though this exact movement isn’t one he’s gone against before, he can judge how Muscular’s quirk is going to manifest as he moves. He takes the hit to his shoulder and rolls, tucking Kouta into his chest and somersaulting out of the path of the hit.

“Monoma!” he shouts, holding Kouta close to him. “Copy his quirk!” Izuku grits his teeth, pushing Kouta behind him and turning his head to speak to him. “Stay back, okay?” he says, voice as soothing as he can make it. “Between the two of us, this guy will be a piece of cake.”

“Oh, wanna bet?” Muscular laughs, rearing back to throw a punch at them, but Izuku sees Monoma behind him, darting forward and tapping Muscular’s side before his own arm grows and swells, twitching as the muscle fibers layer one on top of another. Monoma slams his fist into Muscular’s side, but Muscular barely stumbles, turning to glare at Monoma.

“I think it’ll be pretty easy,” Monoma says with a grin, stepping to the side and throwing an elbow forward at Muscular. *That’s one of my moves*, Izuku realizes.

“Really,” Muscular drawls, and then he’s grabbing Monoma’s elbow, twisting and throwing him toward Izuku and Kouta. Monoma yelps, his back slamming into the ground, and for a terrible moment, Izuku is worried that his back is broken *again*, but Monoma gets up quickly, flicking his hair out of his face with a twitch of his head.

“Midoriya,” he grunts. “This is bad. His quirk relies somewhat on the preexisting muscle mass,” he says, flexing his arm. Izuku watches a layer of muscle build over it, but it doesn’t get anywhere near as big as Muscular’s own. Izuku swallows.

“Okay,” he breathes. “Okay. We need to get Kouta to safety, and then we can get help.” He clenches his hands into fists, getting into a fighting stance. “I wish I had my knives.”

“Where are they?” Monoma asks. Muscular is just watching them, walking forward slowly, like he’s enjoying it.

“In the sleeping area,” Izuku says. “Next time, if we leave right away, we’ll have time to get them.” Monoma chuckles beside him, his brows furrowing.

“Next time, huh?” He shakes his head. “Sounds like you’ve already given up.”

Izuku shrugs. “It’s not giving up if we get another chance, right?” He grimaces. “You should copy my quirk again, though, so that you don’t freak out this time.”

Monoma sighs, reaching out to tap Izuku on the hand, where he’s holding his fist up in a fighting position. “Do we even know I’ll remember if we don’t die at the same time?”

Izuku shrugs. “No clue,” he says, biting his lip. “I don’t actually know how that aspect of it works.”

“Great,” Monoma drawls, rolling his eyes. “That’s so thoughtful of you.”

“Hey,” Muscular hisses. “Did you brats fucking forget about me? I’m going to fucking kill you,” he snarls, slamming his fist into the ground. It cracks the earth there, and Izuku hears Kouta squeak behind him. Izuku’s moving as soon as Muscular is, pulling Kouta out of the way of the next punch, but he can’t dodge it completely himself. The edge of the punch catches his arm, and this hit is more than strong enough for Izuku to gasp in pain as something in his arm *snaps* .

“Midoriya!” Monoma shouts, and Izuku looks up to see Monoma throw a glance over at him as he dodges one of Muscular’s punches. “You okay?”

“Arm’s broken, I’m fine though,” Izuku shouts back, turning to Kouta. “Can you climb on my back? I’m going to try to get you out of here.” Kouta swallows, nods.

“H-He killed my parents,” Kouta says, voice small as Izuku crouches down and the kid clambers onto his back. “I don’t wanna watch him kill you, too.” Izuku swallows.

“I know,” he says. “I’m sorry.” He doesn’t want to lie, doesn’t want to say that Kouta won’t see that, because chances are good he will. Izuku glances up, standing with Kouta on his back and his good arm wrapped around the boy’s ankle to hold him, and he already knows they don’t have much longer. Monoma is fighting Muscular, but for every hit he throws, he has to dodge two. Izuku can see that in just the short time Izuku had been picking Kouta up, Monoma’s already gained a dark bruise on his left forearm and a black eye that looks beyond painful.

Izuku grits his teeth and *runs* , the pain jostling his broken arm, but he doesn't hesitate, doesn't look back even as he runs past Muscular and Monoma. The sounds of the fight are familiar, but it makes him sick to his stomach to hear the sound of flesh against flesh and know that, this time, it's not *just* him who has to die. His brain threatens to process the fact that Monoma will die and will *keep* these deaths, even if only in his memories and not his body, but Izuku pushes the thought down and pushes himself to run faster instead.

He slides to the edge of the ridge, where the path curls, and he stops, crouching. “Kouta,” he says, quiet. “I need to help Monoma. Can you run back to Mandalay for me? She’s probably worried about you.” Kouta’s eyes are huge and wet, and he shakes his head.

“You’re gonna die!” he shouts, and Izuku grits his teeth, praying the sound won’t draw Muscular away. “You’re both gonna die, and then it’ll be my fault and you won’t come back.” He draws in a shaky little breath. “It’ll be just like mom and dad. You won’t come back and then I’ll be all alone again.”

“You wouldn’t be alone,” Izuku says. “I *promise* , you will see me again, okay? Even if it’s not how you expect. No matter what, you *will* see me again.” He holds up his good hand, extending a pinky. “I swear.”

“I-I’m too old for pinky promises,” Kouta says, sniffing, but he raises his tiny hand and locks pinkies with Izuku anyway. Izuku gives him a smile, feeling calmer than he should.

“Okay,” he says. “Now go and get yourself somewhere safe, okay? I’ll see you soon.” He stands up straight, watching as Kouta nods, turning and running away. Izuku takes a deep breath, steeling himself for what he might see, and turns, runs back toward Monoma and Muscular. *I can still hear them fighting*, he realizes , *which is a good sign. I think* .

Except when he turns the corner, he sees the *exact* moment that Monoma's quirk runs out of time. He sees Monoma's legs shrink their normal size, just as he's using them to dodge out of the way of punch, and instead of dodging, Monoma more just... slips. Izuku winces in sympathy, skidding in front of them as Muscular grins, grabbing Monoma by his arm and holding him up in the air. Monoma's face is swollen, but Izuku can see him look over at Izuku.

"I-I need a refresh..." Monoma says, gasping. Izuku wonders why he doesn't copy Muscular's quirk from the contact that holds him up, then he sees muscle fibers start to twitch a form, sluggish around Monoma's shoulders. Izuku grits his teeth and swallows, throwing himself forward quickly and slapping one hand into Monoma's ankle, where skin shows between his shoes and his sweatpants. Muscular growls beside him, and Izuku feels a fist close on the back of his long-sleeved shirt, jerking him down and sending him crashing into the ground. Izuku blinks stars away from his vision and pulls himself to a sitting position, just in time for Muscular to slam a foot down into Izuku's stomach.

"Midoriya!" Monoma shouts, but Izuku can't get up, even as he claws at Muscular's leg with his nails, digging his fingers in and trying to pry Muscular off of him. It's hard to breathe, with the foot pressing down on his chest, and the closest thing he can do to replying is to wheeze, a squeaking sound that rips out of his throat. Muscular presses down hard, and then his weight is gone all at once as Monoma slams into his leg, shoving him off of Izuku.

Izuku can't get up, so he just lies there, gasping and choking on air. Monoma crouches down beside him, grabs his hands, holds them. Izuku's confused, for a moment, why he isn't fighting, but then Izuku tries to take in a full breath and he *can't*. It's worse that last time, and when he drops his eyes down, he can see a hole through his ribcage, bones sticking out, blood slick over their white surface.

"I-It's okay," Monoma says, even though Izuku can see that his eyes are full of fear, bright and wet. "You'll come back. You'll come back, and we'll do better next time, right?" He squeezes Izuku's hands, and Izuku coughs wetly in response. Monoma winces.

"God, what the fuck is wrong with you two?" Muscular says from above them. Izuku can't see the villain, but he can see the way Monoma looks up, quickly, teeth bared.

"You're the asshole who keeps killing kids," he snaps, leaning over Izuku protectively. "I don't think you're in any position to judge, frankly." Muscular chuckles darkly, and Izuku blinks, slow. His vision has gone out, for the most part, and all he can really make out is the blue glow of flames behind Monoma and his silhouette.

"I'm sorry, Midoriya," Monoma says. "I don't think I'm going to die at the same time, this round. If I'm annoying again, you can just punch me, or something." Izuku tries to laugh at that, but it just makes a wet gurgle somewhere in the space his lower ribs should be, and his vision goes completely dark.

In the few seconds before everything fades away, he feels warm hands holding his own limp ones, and he begs his quirk *please, just this once, don't let me be alone*.

Chapter End Notes

cw: graphic descriptions of a dead child, graphic gore (like, very graphic!), vomiting

discord: <https://discord.gg/Vqaj62ceCt>

i hope you all enjoyed!! thank you as always for the unending support! im sooooo excited to write this arc

summer camp, part 4

Chapter Summary

last time: izuku and monoma find a dead body, then die! then monoma remembers (whoa) and izuku has to calm his ass down, except izuku dies again lol

Chapter Notes

HHHHHHH

im so pumped ily guys sm lets DO THIS

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Izuku blinks his eyes open, and he hears a sharp intake of breath to his left. He turns his head, makes eye contact with Monoma, who nods, just slightly. Izuku breathes a sigh of relief, then turns to the front of the class and raises his hand.

“Aizawa-sensei?” he asks, putting his normal level of cheer in his voice. “Can I go use the restroom?” Aizawa turns, makes eye contact with him, raising an eyebrow.

“Sure,” he says. “But be quick.” Izuku nods, standing up, and he sees Monoma perk up.

“Oh, maybe we should take a short break? I also need to use the bathroom,” Monoma says tipping his head to the side slightly.

“You can wait until Midoriya comes back,” Aizawa says, dully. Monoma clicks his tongue.

“I’ll be quick,” he says, standing up from his seat. Aizawa gives him an unimpressed look. “Buddy system, right?” Monoma says, a smirk climbing up his lips. Izuku walks over to the door out of the classroom building, setting his hand on the handle.

“Midoriya can find the restroom himself,” Aizawa says, sighing. “Why do you want to go with him so badly?” he asks, arching an eyebrow. Monoma shrugs, walking forward so he’s right beside Izuku, between him and Aizawa.

“Wouldn’t you like to know?” he asks, winking at Aizawa. Izuku blinks as Aizawa starts slightly, then glares at Monoma, opening his mouth to say something and reaching a hand for his capture weapon. Monoma reaches up, quickly, and taps the back of Aizawa’s hand with his index finger.

“I’ll practice while I’m gone,” Monoma says, grinning. “That’ll make it better, right?” He turns nudging Izuku with an elbow, and Izuku gets the message, opening the door and rushing out of the building before Aizawa can stop either of them. Monoma stumbles out behind him, shutting the door with a breathless laugh.

“Oh my god, Monoma,” Izuku says, shaking his head. “That was--”

“Genius?” Monoma interrupts, chuckling. “C’mon, lets go get your knives before your teacher gets me. We have about six minutes.”

Izuku nods. “Right,” he says, running to the next building over and practically throwing himself inside. It only takes him a few heartbeats to grab his knives, strapping his belt around his waist and running with his arm guards and mouthpiece in hand, breathless as he bursts out of the building. The second Monoma sees him, he starts running, sprinting across the small clearing that’s between them and the entrance to the path.

Izuku grits his teeth, sliding on his arm guards one at a time and tightening them into place. He would talk, and he’s sure Monoma has more questions, but it takes all of his concentration to sprint and put his armor on at the same time. He straps his second arm guard into place, then opens the container that holds his razor teeth and drops it to the ground, sliding the teeth into his mouth. *Whether I die or I win, I’ll have bigger things to worry about than the case for my costume teeth.*

“W-What did it feel like?” he asks, once his teeth are securely in his mouth. Monoma looks at him.

“Your quirk, or dying?” Monoma asks, arching a brow. Izuku blinks.

“Um. Both just having my quirk and... when we reset. *Did* you die, or did it just...?” Izuku trails off, knowing Monoma understands the question.

“I didn’t die,” he says. “It was... odd.” Monoma gives himself a little shake. “It wasn’t painful, just... wrong. It felt like walking backwards, but not.” He frowns. “I couldn’t see, or anything.” He shrugs. “It was just strange.”

Izuku nods. “Is my quirk really painful? Just copying it, I mean,” he says, and Monoma shakes his head, quickly.

“No, it isn’t. Just the dying part.” He chuckles under his breath. “It just feels like any other quirk.” Izuku nods, and Monoma swallows. “We’re almost there,” he says, voice lower in volume, and Izuku nods again, feeling a bit like a bobblehead. He can see the curve in the path, can see the way that the ground bends away from them, and as they turn the corner, he sees Muscular.

It’s different, this time, because Muscular is wearing a cloak and a mask, and he’s standing with his back pressed against the cliff behind him, in shadow. He’s facing them, and Izuku sees him tilt his head when they turn the corner. Further along the ridge, Izuku can see Kouta, sitting on the ground with a stick, tracing patterns in the soil. Izuku skids to a stop, Monoma beside him, the hair already starting to rise away from Monoma’s head. Izuku doesn’t hesitate, understands the situation they’re in all too well as he charges forward, tugging his knives from his belt and running forward at Muscular.

Muscular grunts, and Izuku can see him pause, startled, then rip off his cloak and mask in one smooth movement. He stares at his arm, flexes the muscles there, but nothing comes of it. His gaze snaps up just as Izuku lunges at him, knives slicing through air and then flesh as Muscular raises his arm, the blades sinking into the meat of his forearm.

“Fuck!” Muscular swears, but when he says next is drowned out by Mandalay’s voice ringing through Izuku’s head.

“**Everyone!**” Mandalay says as Izuku yanks his knives out of Muscular’s arm and darts forward, slashing two matching red lines on Muscular’s chest. He hisses as a knee strike, still stronger than

he's used to even without a quirk behind it, slams into his chest, just below his sternum.

“Two villains have invaded. There are likely more,” she says, and Izuku knows he's short on time, knows Monoma will have to blink and knows he'll run out of the copy soon. **“If you are able to do so safely, get to the building immediately. If you encounter an enemy, do not engage. I repeat, do not engage. Continue your retreat.”** Izuku turns his head as Muscular grabs for his neck, and Izuku buries his teeth into Muscular's wrist. It feels different than without the mouthpiece, and his teeth slice through so *easily*, hot salty blood filling his mouth. His teeth stop against *bone*, and he hears Muscular shout in surprise, trying to jerk his wrist away from Izuku's mouth.

“Stay back!” Izuku hears Monoma shout, but all Izuku can see is Muscular, so he just has to hope that was directed at Kouta and not him. Izuku pushes back against Muscular, grunting as Muscular kicks and punches at him, trying to rip him off of his arm.

“Midoriya, not much longer,” Monoma says, a warning clear in his voice. At the movement, Muscular jerks, twisting.

“Oh, so *you're* the one stopping my quirk,” he says, pain and rage heavy in his voice. “Fucking brat,” he says, and Izuku glances up, teeth still in Muscular's wrist. He can feel blood pulsing, *pumping* out of the wound, and he knows it's enough for Muscular to bleed out, given enough time, but he also knows it'll take longer than however much time they have left. Izuku can see the smooth expanse of Muscular's neck, the muscles that twist and turn as Muscular turns his head to the side. Izuku knows, intimately, where to aim as he stabs forward with a knife, and he buries a blade in the space between Muscular's windpipe and neck muscle without thinking. It's almost instinctual, and Izuku doesn't think as he drags the blade down, slicing through flesh cleanly, before jerking it out.

A fountain of red, glistening in the dark light and reflecting the blue flame of the forest behind them, sprays from Muscular's neck, and Izuku's eyes shut on instinct as hot blood splashes on his face.

“I'm blinking!” Monoma shouts, and Izuku unlatches his teeth from Muscular's wrist and throws himself back, out of the way, but it doesn't seem to matter, because when he wipes the blood from his eyes and looks up, braced to dodge an attack, Muscular isn't moving toward him. He's slumped, back against the rock face, and he's twitching, writhing. The wound in his neck pulses a steady stream of blood that pools around him, soaking into the ground. Izuku stares, wide eyed, as Muscular struggles, fingers scraping in his own blood as he gasps, eyes open and wide, then falls still. Muscular's eyes are half lidded, still open, and the wound in his neck still bleeds, but Izuku sees the stream of blood grow thinner, watches as the force of it pulsing out of his neck weakens with each passing second.

“Midoriya,” Monoma says, and Izuku swallows, shaking his head. He can't look away from Muscular, the man who's killed him twice now drenched in his own blood, limp and still. The stream of blood has slowed to a trickle, barely anything at all, and Izuku can see an unnatural pallor to Muscular's skin.

“I-I killed him,” Izuku whispers, stepping back, dropping his knives. He looks down at his hands, and he sees them covered in red blood, sticky, clotting blood. It's like glue between his fingers as he turns his hands over, watching the way the liquid gathers in the cracks and grooves in his skin. Izuku's seen blood before, seen *lots* of blood, but it was always, always his own. This is different. Izuku gags, but he swallows it back down, tears burning in the corners of his eyes.

“Hey,” Monoma says, and suddenly he’s a lot closer to Izuku, setting a hand on his shoulder. “We need to get Kouta somewhere safe,” he says, and when he jerks his head down and to the side, Izuku follows the movement with his eyes, his gaze landing on Kouta. Kouta is standing, eyes huge and dark and wet with tears, his hands clinging to Monoma’s sweatpants.

“I killed him,” Izuku whispers, and Monoma sighs, nodding.

“You did. Can we save the mental breakdown for later?” he says, his hand squeezing Izuku’s shoulder. “You’re okay. We’re all alive. We need to get Kouta somewhere safe, and then you can freak out.” Izuku swallows back his panic, wipes his hands off on his shorts. They stick, slightly, and it makes him feel kind of sick, but he doesn’t think about it as Monoma leans down, giving Kouta a smile.

“I’ll carry you, okay?” he says, reaching down and picking Kouta up under the armpits, lifting him up so that he’s held to Monoma’s side, one of Monoma’s hands under his butt and the other holding his back.

“He killed my parents,” Kouta says, eyes on the dead body. “He killed my parents, and he was gonna kill me?” He looks up at Monoma, and Izuku can see that his eyes are huge and wet. Monoma nods, face solemn.

“He would have,” he says, and he glances up, his gaze meeting Izuku’s. “He would have killed all three of us, but we’re safe now.” Izuku takes a deep breath, steadying himself.

“Y-Yeah,” he says, nodding. “We’re okay now, Kouta. We’re going to go back to the camp, and we’ll get you to the pros.” He gives Kouta a weak smile, and Kouta nods, pressing his tiny face into Monoma’s arm. Izuku moves his gaze to Monoma, and when they make eye contact, they both start walking, moving back to the camp at a jog. The path back to camp isn’t blazing with that blue fire, not yet, but Izuku can see fires up ahead, blazing in the annex classroom. He can see the silhouettes of who he thinks is Kirishima, Satou, and Vlad King, running from the building and across the clearing, out of Izuku’s line of sight. Another figure runs towards them, the thin fabric of a capture scarf and the long, black hair making them recognizable as Aizawa, even backlit by blue flame.

“Midoriya, Monoma where did you--” Aizawa starts to ask, voice full of anger, but he freezes, eyes widening slightly. “Midoriya, you’re covered in blood,” he says, blinking. “What happened? Where are you injured?” Izuku shakes his head.

“I-I’m okay!” he says. “We need to leave Kouta with you, we got him away from Muscular, but I need to get a message to Mandalay.” He gestures at Monoma, who sets Kouta down, carefully.

“Midoriya, where are you injured?” Aizawa asks again, stepping forward, his eyes raking over Izuku’s body. Izuku shakes his head again.

“I’m not,” he says, turning. “I have to tell Mandalay--” Izuku cuts himself off as Aizawa growls,

“You’re *covered* in blood,” Aizawa says, voice thick with alarm. “You’re not going anywhere.” Izuku blinks.

“Oh, i-it’s not mine,” he says, taking a step back. “It’s, um, I--” He shakes his head, cutting himself off.

“He slashed Muscular’s--the villain’s--throat,” Monoma says. “He was going to kill us.” Izuku glances over to him, to the serious set to his face and the fire blazing in his eyes. “Now, can we go?”

We have information that we need Mandalay to broadcast.” Aizawa’s eyes narrow, and he scowls. Izuku opens his mouth, stared wide-eyed back at his teacher.

“I killed him,” Izuku says, voice small. “He’s dead.” Izuku takes a shaky, uneven breath.

“Yeah, and you saved our lives,” Monoma snaps at him, then glares at Aizawa. “Can we please go, before Midoriya has a mental breakdown?” Aizawa blinks, nodding.

“Yes, you can go,” he says, and Izuku tenses to move, but Aizawa keeps talking. “But tell Mandalay that I’m authorizing all of the members of classes 1-A and 1-B for combat, and as *soon* as you’re done, come back here.” His gaze flickers over the both of them. “I don’t buy that neither of you are injured.”

Izuku sees Monoma nod sharply, and then they’re both turning and running for the woods. This part of the woods isn’t on fire, but it’s thick with heavy smoke, and it tears at Izuku’s throat and lungs as they run, pushing towards where Mandalay is supposed to be. Izuku can hear fighting up ahead, can hear the crackling of fire to his right, and he hears Monoma running to his left, just beside him. The blue light that leaks through the woods is brighter than the moonlight, and it gives an eerie sort of glow to the ground as they run, feet pounding against the earth, the forest tearing at their skin with branches and underbrush.

“Midoriya,” Monoma says, slightly breathless from running. “After we tell Mandalay, we need to hide.” Izuku blinks, feels his brow furrow slightly.

“I need to make sure Kacchan is okay,” he says. “And Todoroki and Iida and Uraraka. They’re still out there, for all I know.” Izuku swallows, licks his chapped lower lip. It tastes like blood that isn’t his.

“Did you not hear what Muscular said?” Monoma asks, voice sharp. “They want to capture me and *kill* you. And *clearly* they won’t hesitate to actually do it!” He huffs out a sharp breath of air. “And who on earth is ‘Kacchan’?”

“I-It’s what I call Bakugou,” Izuku explains. “We’ve known each other since we were little, so--” he cuts himself off shaking his head. “So I’ll die again, if it’s what it takes to save him. You should hide though, you’re right.”

Monoma sighs, shaking his head beside him. “I’m not going to hide if you aren’t,” he says. “But what will you do if Bakugou or I get captured and you’re still alive? You can only go back when you die, right?” His blue eyes slide over to look at Izuku, bright from reflected firelight.

“Right,” Izuku says, throat suddenly dry. “I-If I have to, I can... I can force it.” He sees Monoma’s eyes narrow slightly, then wide suddenly.

“You’d kill yourself,” Monoma says, voice a whisper. “Midoriya, what the *fuck* .” He shakes his head. “Yeah, I’m not going to unpack that right now. Let’s just try *not* to have that happen.” He sighs, running a hand through his blonde hair, and Izuku watches the motion as they move through the forest.

“Sorry,” Izuku says, softly. “I didn’t want anybody to know. I didn’t--I didn’t want anybody to have to go through this.”

Monoma looks over at him, frowning, brows low. “You already were,” he says, quiet. “You’ve been going through this, alone.” He sighs. “When this is all done--” he’s cut off when they burst into a clearing, where Mandalay crutches in front of them, facing off against a villain with a lizard

mutation quirk and another who has something large and wrapped in fabric resting on her shoulder. Izuku can see Tiger across the clearing, lobbing a strong punch at the female villain.

“Mandalay!” Izuku shouts, and the hero casts a glance over her shoulder at them, her black hair swishing slightly. “Kouta is safe! He’s with Eraserhead. I need you to use your quirk to tell everyone that Aizawa-sensei authorized classes 1 A and B for combat,” he says, gritting his teeth as Mandalay dodges out of the way of a hit the lizard villain throws at her.

“Got it!” she shouts, and her quirk fires up in Izuku’s mind. **“I have a message for everyone, from Aizawa. Classes 1-A and 1-B are hereby authorized for combat.”** The message fades, and Mandalay is looking back over her shoulder at the two of them as she jumps forward, launching a kick that the lizard man blocks with both forearms crossed over each other. “Now, get out of here!” she shouts at them, and Izuku shakes his head, but it’s Monoma who speaks.

“The villains have a hitlist,” he says. “We know that they’re trying to capture Bakugou. They want some of us dead, as well,” he says, his eyes flitting over to Izuku. *He didn’t mention either of our places on the hitlist*, Izuku notes, swallowing. Mandalay nods.

“We’ve identified one of the villain’s objectives. They are aiming to capture the student Bakugou, and intend to kill some students as well. Please, Bakugou, get to safety as soon as possible, and everyone should exercise extreme caution.” Mandalay dodges a kick easily. “Anything else?” She asks, and Izuku shakes his head.

“We’re good now!” he says, giving her a grin, then turns to Monoma. “We should go to where the test of courage was, that’s where Kacchan and the others would be.” Monoma hesitates, then nods, and they start running through the forest again.

“I’m going to finish what I was saying, earlier,” Monoma says. “When this is over, you should tell someone. You can’t keep doing this on your own.” Izuku shakes his head, even before Monoma’s finished talking.

“No,” he says. “I’m not going to tell anyone. You can’t tell anyone either.” His voice is firm, but higher pitched than he meant it to be, almost like he’s panicking, slightly. He supposes he kind of is.

“Why not?” Monoma asks, blue eyes wide and lips spread in a frown. “People would treat you different. Treat you *better*. You wouldn’t be quirkless, and you could have people *helping* you with it, instead of having to handicap yourself by hiding it. I don’t get--”

“People would stop me,” Izuku says, cutting Monoma off. His tone is sharp and dark. “If I told people, they’d *stop me*. But nobody else gets it. Nobody could possibly get it.” He grits his teeth. “Monoma, I’ve seen people die over and over again. I’ve seen heroes and the police and our *teachers* fail to save people. If I told someone, and they stopped me from dying, stopped me from killing myself, how many people would suffer because of that?” He swallows down the lump building in his throat, his breath feeling heavy and wet. “How many people would *die* because I was too weak to bear this alone?”

“That’s...” Monoma shakes his head. “That’s not your *fault*. You’d still save people, you’d still be a hero, you just wouldn’t be alone.” His voice is shaky. “How many times have you died, Midoriya? How many times has someone done something because they didn’t know about your quirk that ended up with you dead?” His voice is pleading. “You can’t keep this up, one of these days you--” Izuku laughs, cutting him off.

“I’ll die?” Izuku asks. “Yeah, that’s kind of the *point*,” he breaks off, sobbing the last word. He

hates the way that he's crying, even now, with his skin coated in the blood of a man that he killed.

"Just Aizawa or Vlad-sensei," Monoma pleads. "Vlad-sensei knows about--he knows my secrets. They're nothing like this, but he's helped." Izuku shakes his head.

"A teacher would *definitely* stop me," he says. "And I can't just tell anyone, not when the villains found the location of this camp, too. What if a villain hears about my quirk?" He bites his lip hard enough to draw blood. "I'll become a target. I-I'm not stupid. People would *kill* for my quirk, Monoma. I'm immortal." Izuku shakes his head. "You'll keep this secret. If you don't, well, I can always reset until you do."

Monoma makes a choking noise, stumbling slightly as he runs before he catches himself. "Oh my god," he breathes. "Did you just--you just threatened to kill yourself," he says, incredulous. "You just threatened to kill yourself, if I told someone." He makes a small noise. "Oh my god, you are so fucked up. You do realize how fucked up that is, right?"

"I-It's not--" Izuku shakes his head, reaches up a hand to run through his hair, tugging at the curls. "It's not like *that*, I-I'm just saying I'd time travel to undo it, not that I'd--" He bites his lip, chokes on the sob that rises in his throat. "I'm j-just doing what I have to do," he says. "I'd die for you, if you died. I'd reset if you died or got captured, too, it's not just if you told someone--it's the *only* way that I can be *useful*! It's the only way I have any control, any strength at all," he says, voice uneven and shaky and ugly, but Izuku can't even make his heart slow in his chest right now, so he's not sure what other options there are, really.

"Yeah," Monoma breathes. "Fuck. This is so fucked." He runs a hand through his hair, mirroring Izuku. "Okay. Okay, I'll keep my mouth shut, for now. We can work this out when we're not in the middle of a villain attack." He sighs, giving himself a shake. "God, I knew 1-A was fucked up, but I didn't know it was like *this*," he murmurs, and Izuku swallows.

"I-I'm sorry," Izuku says, voice thick with tears. "I'm sorry, Monoma I didn't--I really didn't want to get you involved," he says, his voice shuddering around the lump in his throat. Monoma sighs.

"I know," he murmurs, voice heavy with something Izuku thinks is regret. "It's not your fault, Midoriya. You didn't pick your quirk. Nobody does." Izuku nods, and there's so much more that he wants to say, but they're bursting out into a path, and there's three people in front of them, and Izuku can't breathe.

Shouji, blood dripping from multiple wounds like gunshots in the membranes of his arms, is standing, guarding Tokoyami's unconscious form where he lies in a heap on the ground, blood spilling from a gash on the side of his head, trickling along his dark feathers and dripping slowly onto the earth. He's breathing, his chest rising and falling quickly, but it doesn't make Izuku feel any better, because just in front of them, blocking the way further along the path, there's someone else he recognizes.

Leadfoot is hovering a few feet above the ground, her metal platform boots and the bands around her arms and legs glowing a faint violet. Her mask and metal ears glow, too, but what stands out is the swirling cloud of tiny metal balls spinning around her, making a field of what looks like *bullets*, whipping through the air with whistling noises. The wounds on Shouji's arms, the scrapes on his face and the cuts in the trees nearby all make sense, and Izuku swallows back his fear as Leadfoot's gaze turns to him and Monoma where they'd just emerged from the woods.

"Oh," she says. "Well, that saves me the trouble of looking, I guess." She sounds strangely disappointed. "You should leave, now," she says, gesturing at Shouji. The bullets-- *ball bearings*, Izuku realizes--around her move out of the way of her hand, like they're repelled. Shouji leans into

a fighting stance, his brows low and angry.

“I’m not going to leave my friends here to fight you,” Shouji says from a mouth that opens on one of his arms. He glances to where Izuku and Monoma are standing. “She can manipulate metal, but it’s just whatever she’s brought with her. Tokoyami lost control of Dark Shadow and took out her partner, but when he tried to attack her,” he nods to Leadfoot, “she hit him with one of those blades on her head.”

Leadfoot crosses her arms over her chest. “I could have killed him,” she says. “I normally *would* , but I’m after certain students right now, so if you two,” she gestures to Izuku and Monoma, “would come with me, that would make this a lot less painful for everyone involved.”

“I thought Midoriya was on the kill list,” Monoma says, taking a step forward, setting himself just in front of Izuku. Izuku reaches out a hand, brushing his fingers against Monoma’s palm, and Monoma glances over his shoulder at him, nods slightly.

“He is,” Leadfoot says, cocking her head to the side. “I can make it painless, though.” Izuku swallows, because he knows first hand that she can.

“None of our quirks are a good counter to hers,” Izuku says. “But I know some that are.” He glances to Shouji, who nods, and Leadfoot sighs.

“I’m not going to let you run,” she starts, and then there’s the sound of gunshot from the woods, and she blinks, turning her head to look in the direction of the noise.

“Go!” Monoma whispers, and suddenly he’s pushing Izuku out into the path and running in front of him, between Leadfoot and the other students. Izuku blinks, then he puts it together. *If he’s on the capture list, he’s the only one she can’t kill* , he thinks, gritting his teeth and ducking down, grabbing Tokoyami by the collar of his shirt and hauling him up. Izuku hears Monoma curse, his voice heavy with pain, but he doesn’t let himself look, instead handing Tokoyami off to Shouji.

“Sensei is back at the camp,” he says, meeting Shouji’s eyes. “We’ll be fine. Run!” Shouji nods, scooping Tokoyami up in his bleeding arms, and running in the direction Izuku and Monoma had come from. Izuku whips around to see Monoma standing in front of Leadfoot, one hand clutched over a bleeding wound on his upper arm and a grimace on his face.

“You’re really not very smart, are you?” Leadfoot asks, sighing and floating lower to the ground. She raises a hand, and suddenly a halo of ball bearings, all made of the same dark metal, are hovering around Monoma, like a cage. “Captured,” she says, sounding tired.

“Leadfoot,” Izuku says, and her gaze snaps up to him. “It’s lead, isn’t it?” he asks, tipping his head to the side. “Your quirk only works on one type of metal.” Monoma glances back at him, a confused gleam to his eyes.

“How do you know my name?” she asks, frowning. “I don’t think anyone’s said it in front of you.” Izuku shrugs, gives her the smallest hint of a smile.

“Same way I know that Fangirl is named Manami,” he says, staring through the holes of her mask to meet her eyes. “Same way I know you’re on the diplomatic team. Or were, I guess.” Leadfoot blinks, then sighs.

“You’ve gotten better at stealth, haven’t you?” she asks, and as she shakes her head, Izuku meets Monoma’s eyes again, flicks them back and forth from him and Leadfoot.

“I have,” Izuku replies. “I’ve been so close that I could *reach out and touch you* ,” he says, and he

sees the way realization spills over Monoma's face, and then the boy is darting a hand out, reaching for the exposed skin on Leadfoot's wrist. A ball bearing whips forward, digging into Monoma's forearm, and Izuku can hear him hiss in pain, but then all of the ball bearings suddenly freeze in midair, even the ones that had been swirling around Leadfoot like a cloud of angry gnats. Leadfoot steps back, eyes wide, and raises a hand, shaking slightly. The ball bearings twitch, and Monoma grunts, dropping to one knee.

"Midoriya," he gasps. "This is--She's stronger than me," he says, and Izuku gets the message. He runs forward, flicking his wrist and whipping out a knife that he slashes at Leadfoot's chest, slicing through the fabric there and creating a line of exposed skin that bleeds dark red, almost invisible on the dark fabric of her suit. Leadfoot hisses, trying to move back again, but Izuku sees a flash of purple at her boots, and her feet don't lift. Instead, she tumbles backwards, swearing as she lands on her ass on the ground, and then Izuku is running as fast as he can, tearing away from her. He hears Monoma's footsteps beside his, his breath coming too quick, and when he glances over, he sees a thin trail of blood running from his nose and onto his upper lip before he raises an arm and wipes it away.

"Are you okay?" Izuku asks, breath coming fast from running. Monoma nods.

"Y-Yeah," he gasps. "It hurts, her quirk. Like arm wrestling with your brain," he says, coughing and spitting up a glob of dark blood. "S from my nose," he says, glancing over at Izuku, and Izuku just nods, pressing his lips into a thin line. They run through the woods, but it's only a short distance before they're on another piece of the path, skidding to a halt in front of a sheet of ice that rises in front of them.

"Todoroki!" Izuku gasps, a smile splitting his face. "It's me and Monoma!" he shouts, and the ice wall is knocked away by a blast just as quickly as it'd formed. Izuku blinks, looking at Kacchan and Todoroki where they stand side by side. Kacchan's face and upper body are covered in small cuts, little pieces of something white and shiny embedded in them. It looks almost like a shattered plate, and Todoroki has a few similar wounds on his leg. On Todoroki's upper arm, on his left side, there's a bandage tied haphazardly, blood seeping through, and it takes Izuku noticing that Kacchan's shirt is ripped at the bottom to realize that it's a piece of his t-shirt.

"Midoriya," Todoroki says, his eyes wide and his brows furrowed. "Are you--"

"I'm fine!" Izuku says, waving his hands in front of his body. "It's not my blood." Monoma beside him, tips his head to the side.

"What about you two? That looks nasty, Todoroki," he says gesturing to the bloodied cloth on his arm. Todoroki glances down at it.

"We fought a villain calling herself Dollface," he says. "She seemed to be able to create ceramic. I'm not entirely sure how it worked." He looks back up at them. "She's been neutralized."

Kacchan snorts. "Yeah, no thanks to you! Turns out that fuckin' porcelain or whatever ain't so great against explosions," he says his palms crackling at his sides.

"We should get you somewhere safe," Izuku says, looking to Kacchan. "You're on the villain's list."

"So is he," Todoroki says, gesturing to Monoma. "Our opponent liked to talk," Todoroki says by way of explanation, and Izuku nods.

"We should get to safety," he says. "All of us. We don't know what the villains want, other than

Monoma and Kacchan.” Kacchan growls.

“I don’t need your fucking protection,” he hisses, folding his arms over his chest. “I can take care of myself.”

“This isn’t the time to put on a tough act,” Todoroki says, face calm. “We don’t know how many villains are here, or who we’re up against. Retreating is the best option.”

Monoma nods. “I agree. There’s no reason to stay out here anymore, anyway.” He glances to Izuku, and Izuku bites his lip before nodding.

“I’d like to get everyone, but I don’t think it’s possible...” he sighs, swallowing. “We’ll have to trust that everyone is strong enough to survive,” he says, even though he hates it. *If someone dies*, he thinks, *I’ll just kill myself and try again*.

“Whatever,” Kacchan huffs, scowling. “This is fucking stupid. I could take any of these freaks.” Todoroki rolls his eyes beside him, and it surprises Izuku so much that he can feel his eyes widen the slightest bit. He shakes it off though.

“Todoroki, you can take the front,” he says. “We can have Kacchan and Monoma in the middle, and I’ll take the back.” He swallows. “That way, they have to get through one of us to get either of them.”

“That’s fucking stupid,” Kacchan says. “Put Todoroki in front and me in back. Two strongest quirks should take the two most vulnerable positions.” Izuku blinks, opening his mouth to respond, but Monoma huffs out a laugh from beside him.

“In this close of quarters, I have the strongest quirk,” he says, shrugging. “Why don’t we have Todoroki in front and the three of us can all take the rear? The path is wide enough,” he says, gesturing. Kacchan’s eyes narrow, and he growls low under his breath.

“That sounds fine to me,” Todoroki says, cutting off whatever Kacchan had been about to complain. “We should get going, though.” Izuku nods, and Todoroki starts walking, leading the way back toward the camp. Kacchan walks on Izuku’s left, Monoma on his right, and they start to move along the path, walking quickly but not jogging.

Moving at this pace, the forest is louder, it seems. Izuku hates the way that he can still hear the distant sounds of fighting, but not as much as he hates that he can hear the fires where they must be spreading. It’s a roar, almost, a crackling backdrop to their trek along the path, and between that and the way Izuku can hear the dulled sounds of shouting, of crashing through trees, he almost doesn’t hear a sound he’s grown used to listening to.

From behind them, Izuku hears a series of quick, light footsteps, and by the time he’s turning, Kacchan is already gone, a smooth blue marble clutched in a gloved hand in his place. Izuku opens his mouth to shout, to say something, but he sees the villain, cloaked in dark robes and wearing a strange mask, reach for Monoma, and Izuku moves without thinking. He shoves Monoma, *hard*, and it sends his friend stumbling away, shouting in surprise. Izuku bites his lip, watches Monoma catch himself and watches a blaze of red fire spark and grow from Todoroki, but it’s the last thing he sees. His vision tunnels, bends and tints blue, and then he sees nothing at all.

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The space inside the marble is dull, fuzzy. Izuku isn’t conscious, not really, but he can tell that he’s being moved, that there’s noise. He can’t react, though, can’t think or move or talk, so he floats,

distant. He feels like he's underwater, but he isn't drowning.

The only thing that breaks through the haze of it, the deep blue that permeates his being, is the sensation of fingers, cool and bare, touching the outside of the marble, almost catching it. They're different from the hands of the man who'd captured him--Izuku can't feel the gloved hands. Izuku tries his best, urges himself to move, to slip into the hand of the person reaching out for him, but it doesn't work. He slips back into nothing.

And then he's out, just like that, the world splitting open into reality, except he's waist deep in a swirling dark mist that makes him think of Thirteen and the USJ and Shigaraki choking him. He's reaching out, eyes wide as he stares at the faces of his friends--Uraraka, Tsuyu, Kaminari, Ashido, Monoma, and Todoroki--all reaching for him with desperate, terrified looks on their faces. Beside him, Izuku feels movement in the portal, and he turns to see Kacchan beside him, deeper in the portal by a few feet, struggling at the mist, trying to pry himself out. Izuku opens his mouth shouts,

"Kacchan!" and then he's under again, back in a cocoon of blue that makes him want to scream, makes him wish he could *feel* something so that he could react, so that he could pull himself out of the ball of empty he's curled up in. But he can't, and the longer he spends like this, compressed and small and blue, the less he can think. Izuku floats, lost.

Chapter End Notes

cw: murder, i think there's vomiting in there but idk actually

discord: <https://discord.gg/Vqaj62ceCt>

HEY GUYS DFHGDFHGDF god im so sosososo hyped rn yall don't even KNOW and :D :D

thank you all for the support!!!! this story is heating up dkjfhdfk im just so freaking excited! see yall tomorrow :D

oh, and this is the last chapter of the summer camp arc! next is, well.... you'll see

captivity, part 1

Chapter Summary

last time: izuku commits homicide on muscular, runs through the forest fighting people, and then becomes a marble as he and kacchan get kidnapped majorly

Chapter Notes

hiiiiiiiiiiii im so excited about this arc <3

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Izuku blinks his eyes open as he tumbles out of the marble and onto a wooden floor, his head spinning. He hears gasping beside him, and when he jerks his head up, he sees Kacchan, kneeling on the ground and whipping his head around, taking in their surroundings.

“Kacchan?” Izuku asks, and then chokes on his words as something heavy slams into his chest. He blinks, looking up to see the female villain who’d been fighting against Tiger, holding whatever her heavy weapon actually is to his chest.

“Magne,” a voice says, and Izuku turns to see Kurogiri shake his head. Izuku blinks, glancing around, and he swallows. Leadfoot and Manami are standing off to the side, with a girl about his age clinging to Manami’s arm, her golden eyes marked with the hearts that mean Manami’s quirk is activated on her. Her blonde hair is tied up on two matching buns, and when Izuku makes eye contact with her, she giggles.

“Aw, he’s so *cute*,” she says, voice sing-song. “I really just want to get in there and squish his cheeks and *stab* him!” She giggles, then jerks forward, but Manami grabs her by the biceps and tugs her back, grinning. Kacchan growls from his place beside Izuku, but Magne or whoever she is slams her weapon back into his head and he crashes to the ground, eyes still open but narrowed in pain.

“I know, right? But he’s ours, Toga. You guys get the other one.” Manami laughs, and Toga goes along with her, giggling and grinning. Izuku feels like he’s missing something. He glances around the room, still feeling dazed, and he sees Kurogiri, Shigaraki, and a woman with long, white-blond hair that hangs almost to her knees wearing a cream colored suit, completely covered in soot and explosion marks that Izuku recognizes from years of being tormented by Kacchan. She’s leaning heavily on the masked man with the top hat, her breaths coming quickly and unevenly, and her arms are wrapped around her midsection tightly, like she’s trying to hold herself together. Izuku swallows, shifts his gaze further.

He sees Mr. Clean standing beside Dabi, leaning about as far away from the other guy as he possibly can. On Dabi’s other side, there’s the lizard mutation villain, looking annoyed, and some guy who kind of looks like Deadpool from the old American comics. The lizard guy sighs, then looks over to where Leadfoot and Manami are standing.

“He’s not even your original target,” he says, scowling. “What are you going to do with him, anyway? Stain saved him, so if you’re just going to kill him, I don’t think it’s something I could easily accept.” Leadfoot tips her head to the side, putting one hand on her hip.

“It’s none of your business what we do with him, Spinner,” she says. “You and yours failed to hold up your end of the deal, after all. You got your primary target, so it’s only fair the Gekkeiju take the consolation prize.” Izuku bites at his lip, the sharp edge of his razor teeth barely brushing the skin there before he stops, realizing that *oh, I’m still armed*. He quickly shuts his mouth, hoping that none of the villains have the sense to disarm him. After all, his remaining knife is hidden in his left arm guard, and his mouth piece is so innocuous that he forgets it’s there most of the time.

“Shut that fuck up,” Kacchan growls. “Deku’s not a piece of meat. Let us go,” he says, his palms sparking with explosions, and the masked man sighs, reaching out a hand that Kacchan tries to bat away. When they make contact, Kacchan disappears in a swirl of blue light, a small blue marble in his place that the villain snatches out of the air with one hand.

“In all fairness,” the masked man says, gesturing with his hand, the marble held between two fingers, “both of our organizations failed to obtain the other target. We also don’t know the relative usefulness of this boy at this point. It would be unwise to assume he has no value.”

“Exactly, Mr. Compress,” Kurogiri says. “And we sustained far greater casualties in this operation. If you have no pre-existing plans for Midoriya, we should be the ones to take him. After all, he *was* on our kill list.” Kurogiri’s head turns, like he’s looking at Shigaraki, who’s just standing there and scratching furiously at his neck.

Leadfoot sighs. “It’s your fault you lost so many,” she says, shrugging. “If you’d selected your team more carefully, you wouldn’t have had that problem. As it is, anybody who actually stayed with their partner like they were meant to was fine.” She folds his arms over her chest, over the injury on the front of her body. “We’re taking Midoriya, and that’s final. If you want to negotiate further, you’re welcome to talk to the diplomatic team at our next meeting.”

“We could just take him,” Shigaraki rasps, scratching at his neck. “You’re outnumbered, and Dollface isn’t in any shape to fight.”

The girl leaning on Compress snorts. “Wanna bet, crusty?” she snarls, and Manami starts cackling where she’s holding onto Toga.

“Aw, that’s cute,” she says, pulling Toga in and hugging her from behind. “But they brought me for a reason, y’know? I wonder how good you are at fighting with your emotions amplified.” She squeezes Toga, who giggles, a smile wide on her face. “I know Toga here can handle it, but I doubt you’ve got it in you!”

“Enough,” Leadfoot says, raising a hand to massage the side of her head. “You don’t even have the infrastructure to house a second captive, Shigaraki.” She sighs. “We’re taking Midoriya. Feel free to contact our boss about further negotiations.” She raises a hand and slips a ring off of her middle finger.

“Wait, you’re not going to kill him right here, are you?” Dabi asks, arching an eyebrow. Leadfoot sighs again.

“No, I’m going to knock him out. He’s still armed, you know that, right?” She raises her hand, palm out, and the ring floats above it, tinted with violet light.

“He is? No he isn’t!” the Deadpool-looking guy says, and Izuku blinks, swallowing nervously.

Leadfoot turns to him.

“This will hurt less if you hold still,” she informs him, and Izuku only has time to blink before the ring is shooting forward at him. There’s a bloom of bright pain in his temple, then nothing but black.

--

When Izuku wakes up, it’s to a dull ache in the side of his head and a chill on his skin. He cracks open his eyes, blinking away sleep and pulling himself into a sitting position.

He’s in a relatively bare room, with stone walls painted over a off-white color and an aged linoleum floor. He’s in different clothes--a loose white sweatshirt that’s about three sizes too big for him and a pair of black sweats that are about the same. He reaches up a hand, feeling that the dried blood has at least mostly been cleaned from his skin. His arm guards are missing, and with them his knives. He runs his tongue over his teeth and feels his stomach sink when he realizes that his mouthpiece is gone, too.

Izuku pulls himself to his feet and glances around. There’s only one door, a painted metal thing with no window and a simple silver knob. Izuku walks over and tries it, but it's locked, of course. Izuku turns and walks to the other side of the room, but as soon as he’s turned, he hears the lock on the door click, and he whips around just to see the door crack open.

“Midoriya,” a man’s voice says, and a tall, lithe man in his early twenties walks into the room, his eyes closed. His hair is a shock of bright red next to his pale skin, and Izuku stares at him as he steps in, wearing a pair of black dress pants and a blood red button down that matches his hair. His tie is black, but it’s loose, like he’s tugged it away from his neck a few times already. There’s a scar over his right eye, a mismash of deep gouges that sink into the skin, centered over his eye itself, like someone had slashed at it, over and over. He moves confidently, like he’s used to having his eyes shut, and Izuku wonders, briefly, if that’s his quirk.

“Who are you?” Izuku asks, stepping forward. He’s grateful to not be in restraints, but as the man tugs the door shut behind him and it closes with a soft click, he wonders why he isn’t.

The man opens his right eye, and Izuku can see that the organ is damaged beyond the point of sight. It’s not round, not really, a milky white and brownish-grey lump in his torn-up eye socket. It moves, though, like it’s trying to focus on him.

“Lord Fury is my title,” he says, reaching a hand into his pocket and pulling out a box of cigarettes. “But my name is Kazuo Furuya.” He pulls a cigarette out and slides it between his lips, dipping his hand back into his pocket to pull out a lighter. His broken eye seems to watch Izuku as he lights it, the flame glowing a cherry red in the relatively dim light of the room.

“So you’re the boss of this whole operation,” Izuku says, and he’s surprised when Fury chokes for a second, then tips his head back, laughing.

“Me?” He mimes wiping a tear away from his damaged eye. “Oh gods, no. I don’t know where you got that idea from.” He turns his face toward Izuku again. “I’m going to have a lot of fun with you, you know. It’s been a while since I got ahold of a new toy.”

Izuku opens his mouth to reply, but he stops when Fury cracks open his other eye, revealing a sliver of bright gold, then his entire eye. Izuku sees a strange pattern on his iris, like a sunburst, before he starts to feel it.

It starts in the bones of his face, a thin pressure that builds around his eyes like a sinus headache. The pain grows, a pressing, crushing sensation that spreads like a heavy liquid along his jaw, tracing down the muscles in his neck, and Izuku realizes, with horror, that he can't look away. His pulse thrums a beat of pain in his temples as the pain suddenly sets into every bone in Izuku's body, and he feels like he's just touched a live wire, like he's been dipped in molten magma. It's worse than burning alive, worse than bleeding out. It's worse than everything that's killed him combined, and he feels himself drop to his knees, his vision turning that same gold color as Furuya's eye.

He doesn't know what happens, but when the pain leaves, it feels like it's been a hundred years, and he's on the floor. There's something wet under his head, and he's on his side, his hands in front of him. He can register that they're shaking, that he can see them, but he can't figure out if his eyes are even open for a second. The relief that he feels, now that the pain is fast fading, draining out through his bones, is almost as intense as the pain itself. Izuku feels himself gag, his head knocking against the concrete floor as he dry heaves, and he realizes he's lying in a puddle of his own sick. He tries to move, tries to sit up, but all he can do is jerk his head, his skull knocking painfully on the linoleum. It hurts more than it should, and he realizes that all of his nerves feel like they're burning, prickling with phantoms of the pain from before.

He hears somebody make a shushing sound, soft and low, and he realizes he's been whimpering through gritted teeth, and he forces himself to stop. It makes a pain he hadn't even noticed in his temples lessen, ever so slightly. A pair of soft, gentle hands, picks up his head and tugs it up, out of the pool of sticky, acrid vomit. A warm, wet rag wipes at his cheek and mouth, and he feels his eyes slide shut against his will as his head is set down on something soft that holds his head and neck off of the hard floor. The wet rag wipes over his forehead, over his neck, and Izuku whines, the sensation both painful and soothing.

"Shh," the voice says, and Izuku knows he knows that voice but can't place it. "You'll be okay. The worst is over, now." A hand, gentle and cool, brushes his hair away from his forehead, and he sighs, swallowing the awful taste in his mouth and trying to get some saliva into his mouth so he can *talk*.

"I wasn't done with him," Fury's voice, petulant and irate fills the room, and Izuku flinches, the sensation burning at his raw nerves. A muffled noise escapes him, something between a squeak and a scream, and whoever is crouched beside him sets a cool hand on his cheek.

"24 hours," she says, voice firm. "He'll break if you do it any sooner."

"That's kind of the *point*," Fury hisses, too loud for Izuku's sensitive ears.

"Do you want him obedient, or brain dead?" The hand carefully tucks a lock of his hair behind his ear, and Izuku tries to focus on the sensation rather than the pain that still fills him.

"We're going to kill him anyway. 18 hours," Furuya says.

"24," the woman interjects, voice hard. "Do you think I don't know how your quirk works? Give him 24 hours, and you can have me, too."

Izuku hears a chuckle, low and dark. "You for real? Okay, then. 24 hours."

"It's a deal," the woman whispers, and Izuku hears a thump that must be the door shutting. He tries to open his eyes, but his eyelids feel heavy, sticky. He can feel something akin to unconsciousness threatening to overtake him, but he forces himself to stay awake, if only because he's afraid of what would happen to him if he slept

“M tired,” he says, his throat raw and painful. He coughs, once, and the hand on his face moves to rub circles into his back, between his shoulder blades.

“I know,” she whispers. “I’ve got to get you out of here.” Izuku grimaces, opens his eyes to look up at her, but her face is blurry and his eyes won’t focus. He can tell she’s pale, with dark hair that’s pulled back, but that’s all he can see.

“Kill me,” he says, voice thick and slurred. The woman sighs, soft and exhausted.

“I know,” she says. “I’m not going to let them, though.” She sighs again, and something about it is familiar. “You’re quirkless, so our boss has no use for you.”

Izuku blinks, trying to focus on her face. “Quirkless,” he repeats, dazedly. He can feel his brain trying to slip away into sleep, but he refuses to let it.

“You need to rest,” she says, soft and gentle. Her hand is warm on his back. “I can bring you some food and water in a little bit, but if you don’t sleep, you won’t recover.”

“Who’re you?” Izuku slurs, squinting. Her hand pauses on his back, still for a moment.

“You still can’t see, can you,” she says, but it isn’t a question. “I’ll tell you later, okay? Just sleep, please, Midoriya.” Her hand moves, smoothing over his forehead, gently sliding his eyes closed, and Izuku can’t resist, can’t open his eyes again once they’re shut. He starts to drift into nothingness, and even as he tries to keep himself awake, even as he tries to move, he can’t. Izuku slips into heavy darkness once again.

--

Izuku slowly rises from a heavy sleep, shifting in place before blinking his eyes open. It’s dark in the room, nearly black, and his arms and legs feel half numb, half sore. He manages to sit up, though, and as his eyes focus, he realizes that he’s been moved onto a futon, a pillow where his head had been lying. At the corner of the room, by the door, there’s a bottle of water and what looks like a protein bar. Izuku blinks, glancing around to confirm that he’s alone, then crawls over to the door. His limbs shake, like they’re made of jelly, and he doesn’t trust himself to stand, but he makes it to the water and the protein bar. They’re both unopened, and when Izuku twists the cap of the water bottle it clicks, so he thinks they’re probably safe.

Izuku lifts the water to his lips, and the cooling sensation as the liquid slips down his throat eliminates a burning pain in his chest that he’d barely noticed. Suddenly, he’s chugging the water, so thirsty he thinks he might cry, and too soon, he’s out of water again. Izuku swallows, relishing in the way his throat doesn’t feel quite as scratchy any more, and he grabs the protein bar, tearing the wrapper open. It’s something chocolate flavored, but he can’t really taste much other than the flavor of artificial sweeteners and whey protein, milky and strange, and he eats it in a few ravenous bites anyway. When he finishes, he sets the wrapper on the ground, next to the empty bottle of water, and he just leans back, his eyes sliding shut as he takes stock of how he feels.

Izuku’s head aches, pounds along the temples and his jaw. The pain continues in the bones of his arms and his chest, but it isn’t as bad in his legs. He feels weak all over, like he’d worked out too hard the day before, but when he presses his hands over his body, the only wounds he can identify are a bruise on one temple and some tender spots from where he’d hit the hard floor from falling earlier. All things considered, he’s relatively uninjured. Izuku thinks the heavy fuzz that presses in on his thoughts after just a few moments of being awake, the pain in his head and the weakness in his bones must be the product of Fury’s quirk, then. The thought doesn’t reassure him.

What do I know? He asks himself as he crawls back to the futon, slipping under the blanket and lying down on his less-bruised side. He knows that he's with the Gekkeiju, at some sort of base. He knows that Fury *isn't* their boss, and that whoever'd helped him--Leadfoot, he realizes, that was *Leadfoot* -- after Fury had used his quirk on him said their real boss doesn't have any use for a quirkless person. He knows that they plan to kill him, but also that they wanted him obedient. He knows that Kacchan isn't here, with him. He *thinks* Kacchan is with the League, still, and he's not sure if that's better or worse.

Izuku is suddenly struck by the fact that for all he knows about the Gekkeiju, he knows nearly nothing. He doesn't know their boss, what they do, what their goals are. He doesn't even know where the members he *has* met fit into the organization.

Something else occurs to him. Leadfoot hadn't been wearing her mask, when she'd helped him after Fury had hurt him. Izuku frowns, curling deeper in his blanket. She'd seemed to know exactly what to do, had said she knew how Fury's quirk worked--things like that. Something prickles at the edge of Izuku's mind, but he can't quite pull it together. Something else sticks out to him, though--Fury's name. Kazuo Furuya. He's heard a "Kazuo" mentioned before somewhere, but *where* ?

Izuku's thoughts are interrupted by a soft knock at the door, and he jerks upright, sitting on top of the futon as the door opens, letting soft light into the room. He hears a click, and the lights come on, dim and yellow but there. Izuku blinks as Leadfoot steps into the room, with her mask on but not her ears. She's dressed in clothes he hasn't seen her in, before--a long sleeved black dress that comes down to her knees. It looks soft, like it's pajamas, and she's wearing blue high top sneakers with it. Her knees are bruised black and blue, and where her rings usually are on her hands, Izuku can see bruises along the bones of her hands, blue and violet and red. Izuku blinks as she steps into the room, shutting the door behind her.

"I saw you were awake," she says, gesturing a hand at a corner of the room. Izuku looks up at it and sees a small, shiny black lens--a camera--in the top corner and he swallows, cursing himself for not noticing it in the first place. Leadfoot walks into the room, getting closer to him, and Izuku reflexively leans back, scooting away from her. She freezes, then sighs. Izuku realizes her hair is in low pigtails, not a ponytail, and the tiny difference makes him freeze.

"I'm sorry," she says. "I'd really hoped it wouldn't come to this, but..." She sighs, her shoulders dropping. "I don't have any choice." Her voice is low, defeated, and Izuku feels a bubble of irritation rise in his chest.

"W-What do you mean you don't have any choice?" he asks, voice rising in the quiet room. "*I'm* the one you kidnapped," he snaps, and Leadfoot shakes her head.

"I know," she says, then reaches a hand to her face, her palm and fingers spreading over the face of her mask. "This is the second time, though, that I've failed someone from my other life." The edges of the mask glow a faint violet that travels slowly toward the center of the mask, and Leadfoot is pulling it off of her face before Izuku can even think about what that *means* . He hears himself gasp, softly, as Leadfoot looks up at him with liquid-dark eyes, yellow and green bruises across her nose and under her eyes. Her nose is taped down, like it's healing from being broken, and Izuku swallows as she drops her hand, still clutching the mask.

"Miura," he breathes, and she nods. "Y-You... you knew, then," he says, and she nods again, her gaze trained on the floor.

"That you were Ace?" she asks, softly. "I've known since that day with Clean. I just..." she lifts her head, meets his eyes. "I have to get you out of here," she says, an echo of her words from earlier, when Izuku was weak on the floor, burning with pain.

“What?” Izuku asks, blinking. Miura sighs, taking a few steps and kneeling on the ground next to the futon, her bruised knees resting on the linoleum. She sets the mask down, and it makes a dull clink. Up close, Izuku can see that both it and her are covered in tiny, almost invisible marks. Scars. She meets his eyes.

“I’m going to get you out of here,” she says, serious. “Even if it kills me.” Izuku blinks, swallowing, because he knows that feeling but he doesn’t understand it, not in this situation, not from this person.

“Why?” he asks, and Miura blinks at him. “Why me? You barely know me.”

“I know that you’re hurting,” Miura says, folding her hands in her lap and staring down at them. “And I know that--that I’ve been the cause of some of that hurt. Someone I met, someone I know, they’ve been helping me. For no reason. Even at a detriment to themselves.” Miura sighs, the same soft noise Izuku has heard from Leadfoot so many times. “I don’t want that to go to waste. I can’t help them, not--not like I can help you. I wasn’t careful enough,” she says, and Izuku can hear her voice cracking, breaking.

“Okay,” Izuku says, shaking his head because this is too much. He’s still reeling from the fact that Miura is Leadfoot, from the fact that he’s at the Gekkeiju base and they’re going to kill him, from the fact that he doesn’t know *anything*. His head still aches, burns in a way that he’s never felt before. It’s sharper than when he overuses his quirk, more hot and bright. Izuku swallows.

“Kill me,” he says, looking up at Miura. Her eyes widen, her lips parting ever so slightly, and he says it again. “Kill me, please.”

Miura shakes her head. “No, I--” Izuku cuts her off.

“I know you would have, if you’d caught me as Ace again,” he says, and he sees confusion flit across her features. “And I need you to kill me, now. I’m asking you to.”

Miura shakes her head. “No,” she says, firmer this time. “Even if I thought that was any solution at all, I’m not allowed,” she says. “I’m willing to risk my own safety to save you, but not to kill you.” She meets his eyes, a frown on her face. “If you want my help, we’re doing this on my terms.”

Izuku bites at his lower lip. “Fine,” he says. “What’s your plan?”

Miura smiles. “I’m pretty high up in the organization,” she says, “so as long as my two equals and my boss don’t catch us, I can just walk you right out.” Izuku tips his head to the side.

“Who are your equals?” he asks, and Miura blinks at him.

“Kazuo and Manami,” she answers. “Sorry--Kazuo, that’s Fury.” She sighs, tracing a finger along the bone of her wrist. “We’re all pretty close. It’ll hurt them, what I’m doing.” Izuku watches her face, the way it’s covered in bruises. He thinks about the way she’s always had bruises, even at the hardware store. He wonders if they’ve hurt her before, too.

“When are we going?” Izuku asks, squeezing his hands into fists and then relaxing them, just to test his strength. He still feels weak, wobbly. “Actually, how long was I resting?”

Miura grimaces. “A while. Twenty hours, give or take,” she says, and Izuku’s eyes widen.

“T-Twenty,” he says, his voice shaking. Miura nods.

“Kazuo’s quirk usually puts people out for longer, if they’re not used to it,” she says, her lips

thinning into a grimace. “You must have an insane pain tolerance to be up and moving this soon.” Izuku snorts at that, and Miura raises an eyebrow.

“It’s nothing,” Izuku says, a bitter laugh in his voice. “I don’t know if I can walk,” he says, glancing down at his legs. Miura nods.

“I didn’t expect you to be able to,” she says, getting to her feet. “Your nerves won’t be back to normal for a while.” She holds out a hand to him, and Izuku finds himself staring at the familiar shape of it for a moment too long before he reaches out and takes hold of it, letting Miura tug him up and to his feet. When he sways, his legs wobbling, she steadies him with hands on his shoulders.

“What is his quirk, anyway?” Izuku wonders as Miura steadies him. She frowns, her brows furrowing.

“I don’t know if I should say,” she murmurs. “I think it’ll be easiest to carry you on my back,” she says. “Do you think you can get on yourself?” Izuku thinks on it, then nods. Miura turns, crouching down slightly, and Izuku climbs onto her back. He’s struck by the fact that while she’s taller than him and clearly stronger, she’s also definitely not too much older than him. She lifts him easily, though, carrying him piggyback style.

“His quirk,” she says, voice hesitant. “It does a couple of things, but he can manipulate nerves. He calls it ‘Heaven and Hell’, and what you felt, that was the hell.” Izuku nods into her shoulder.

“It sure felt like it,” he says, and Miura chuckles softly under her breath.

“Yeah,” she replies. “It really does.” She pauses for a moment, breathes. “Are you ready?” Her hands squeeze gently where they’re holding his legs up, keeping him from slipping off of her back.

“I’m ready,” Izuku replies, and Miura starts walking. Izuku realizes the moment they start moving that this won’t be comfortable--every tiny movement sending lightning-shocks of pain through his nerves, like fire climbing his bones--but if he’s anything, he’s used to pain. Izuku just grits his teeth and breathes through it, breathes through Miura opening the door and carrying him out into the hallway.

The hall looks much the same as the room he’d just left, long and poorly lit and made up of plain, cream walls and old, chipping linoleum. Miura carries him to the left of the door they’d come from, turning after just ten feet into a corridor that houses two elevators with shiny stainless steel doors. Their reflections are distorted just blobs of color, black and white and dark green, from Izuku’s hair. Miura leans forward, pressing the button to call the elevator with her elbow, and it beeps softly, the button lighting up orange from behind. Izuku counts his breaths as they wait, trying to keep himself fully focused and present. *I can’t miss any details. I don’t know if I’ll have to do this again .*

The elevator is nicer than the hallway and the room, with polished stone tile on the floor and walls painted a deep blue. The button panel indicates that they’re on “B2,” which is the lowest floor. There seems to only be two basement levels and a first floor, and Miura presses the button for the first floor. Izuku feels the upward lurch of the elevator.

“This one will only take you to the first floor,” Miura says, quietly, “but there are seven stories, plus the two basement levels.” She pauses. “In case you’re ever here again.” Izuku nods.

“In case they capture me again,” he says, and he sees her nod as the elevator doors slide open. She steps out onto the first floor, and Izuku is struck by how *normal* it looks. The floor is polished

marble tiles, white streaked with gold and grey, and the walls are painted a cool grey. The ceiling is high and airy, with lighting that hangs from above. The elevators open into what looks like a lobby, with a large reception desk made of that same white marble with a bored-looking young woman sitting in the reception desk, wearing a black suit over a white button-down and a blue tie. Her long black hair is half-up, half-down, and she wears a name tag that reads *Yamamoto* in neat kanji. She's typing at a computer, and barely glances up at the two of them as they walk in.

"Yamamoto," Miura greets, and Yamamoto nods back at her.

"Miura-sama," she replies, but doesn't look away from the computer, doesn't make eye contact. "Should I send a message for you?"

"No," Miura replies, her voice calm and clear. Yamamoto nods. Izuku hears some rustling, and he looks to see another part of the building, an area carpeted with thick blue shag. There's a set of white couches and arm chairs, surrounding a large, flat screen television, and the walls of the area are tinted windows that show the city outside. Izuku watches, dread pooling in his stomach, and Manami pokes her head up from one of the couches, her red hair loose around her shoulders.

Izuku can see the television behind her playing the news, and he recognizes Aizawa's face, although he's wearing a suit and his hair is half up. He's speaking to the camera, but the sound is off, and Izuku is too far away to read the closed captions. The headline says something about the summer training camp, about two students being missing.

"Sumimi?" Manami asks, tipping her head to the side slightly. Her eyes are normal, her pupils round, and she's wearing a baggy sweatshirt identical to the one Izuku's in--loose and white.

"Manami," Miura says, startled. Manami's eyes narrow, and she stands up, walking around the couch and towards them. She's wearing athletic shorts, which show the fact that her thighs are completely *covered* in self harm wounds, in various stages of healing. Some are even still bleeding. Izuku finds himself staring at them.

"Where are you going with Midoriya?" Manami asks, frowning, almost a pout. Her hair is long when it's down, almost to the small of her back, and it swishes as she moves toward them.

Miura takes a deep breath. "Manami. Turn around and let us go," she says, and Manami blinks, tipping her head to the side.

"Oh, you're rescuing him," she says, matter of fact. "Well, that's not allowed, silly." She huffs out a breath of air, puffs out her cheeks. "I'm gonna kill him now, 'kay?"

"Manami, don't," Miura says, takes a step back. Manami smiles, then reaches up to touch her own cheek. Izuku watches her edges blur in multicolor, watches her pupils turn to hearts. Manami giggles.

"Sorry!" she chirps, but she doesn't sound sorry at all. "Do you have a preference for how I do it, Midoriya? I don't have any weapons, but I could strangle you, or crush your head in, probably."

Izuku sighs. "Whatever's quickest, please," he says, and Miura stiffens underneath him. "I don't care if it hurts. Just get it over with." Manami blinks, then nods.

"Okay!" she sings, then hops forward and reaches out, grabbing him by the collar of his shirt. Her strength is unnatural as she rips him from Miura's back, even as Miura tries to hold onto him. Izuku feels Manami's other hand bury in his hair, not touching his skin, and then his head is being slammed down into the tile, harsh and hard. The impact sends stars through his vision, fills the

bones of his skull with fresh pain. His head is lifted up again, and when he's slammed into the cracked tile the second time, he doesn't feel anything at all.

Chapter End Notes

cw: vomiting, torture, implied abuse

discord: <https://discord.gg/Vqaj62ceCt>

I HOPE YALL LIKE IT and im so ososos os so blown away by the INSANE amount of support on the last two chapters!!! i've read every comment at least twice and i was smiling like an idiot the whole time!!! im so excited for the next few chapters as well. we're so close to the end of the first part of the fic :D

captivity, part 2

Chapter Summary

last time: izuku saw some villains fighting over him, woke up in the basement of the gekkeiju base, got tortured some, and died when miura tried to save him

Chapter Notes

HI GAMERS we don't have safe water where i am rn so school got cancelled and i wrote this instead of doing literally any schoolwork and then??? idek what i did with the rest of the day bc normally i can get way more done lol.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Izuku cracks one eye open, and he knows immediately where he is--when he is. He sits up from the linoleum floor, blinks in the dim light, and looks around the room. The walls are that same cream color, and now that he knows what to look for, Izuku can see the camera in the corner of the floor.

But most strikingly, he isn't in *pain*. He hurts from getting knocked out, from lying on the hard floor, but it's nothing. Izuku feels like he can breathe, like he can *think*, and it's such a drastic change from before that he's not sure how exactly he was moving at *all*. Izuku stands up, and when he hears the doorknob click this time, he turns to face the back wall of the door before the door can open.

"Midoriya," Fury says, just like last time, and Izuku takes a deep breath.

"Furuya," he says. "Kazuo Furuya." He hears the door click shut somewhere behind him, and when a hand comes to rest on his shoulder, he doesn't let himself flinch. He hears Fury hum, low under his breath.

"Did my sister leak my name?" he asks, sounding curious, innocent. "I'm surprised. Maybe you'll be a little more fun than I thought." He chuckles, lightly, starting to walk around to where Izuku's facing the back wall. Izuku slides his eyes shut.

"Who's your sister?" Izuku asks, listening to the sound of Fury's shoes clicking on the floor as his hand slides off of Izuku's shoulder. "I think I've met her."

"Don't you know it's impolite to not look at someone when they're talking to you?" Fury asks, tscking. "Open your eyes, Midoriya. I'd like to see what color they are." He keeps his tone light, but Izuku can hear the irritation there.

"I-I'd rather not," Izuku says, biting at his lower lip. Fury sighs.

"It'll be easier if you do, really," he says, and then Izuku's breath is getting knocked out of him by a fist to his gut, sending him stumbling back a few steps. Izuku gets into a fighting stance, but he quickly realizes just how much he relies on sight to fight when he hears a whoosh of something

moving through the air but doesn't know where to block. The kick connects with his side, and Izuku stumbles to the floor, barely catching himself on the palms of his hands. Izuku braces himself for another hit, his mind calling up old images of being on his hands and knees on the sidewalk beside Aldera Middle School, but the next hit doesn't come. He hears rustling, movement, and then there's a hand on his chin, lifting his head up. Izuku tries to yank his head away, but Fury's grip is strong, almost bruising.

"Who told you?" Fury asks, his fingernails digging into the flesh of Izuku's jaw. Izuku thinks he can feel rings, too, but he doesn't dare open his eyes to check.

"N-Nobody," Izuku grits out. Fury hisses, and Izuku feels his other hand on Izuku's face, around his eye. Izuku struggles back, trying to tug himself away, but that hand moves to his hair and jerks him closer, only for the hand on his jaw to drop to his throat, wrapping around his neck and choking him. Izuku tries to breathe, but he just makes a little wheezing sound, and he presses his eyes shut as tight as he can. He feels the hand in his hair let go, and he shakes his head *no* as hard as he can, but Fury grabs at his right eye, peeling the eye open with two fingers. As hard as Izuku tries to hold it shut, to move away, he *can't*, and his eye opens to the blurry view of a golden eye with a sunburst of lines leading away from the pupil.

Izuku's world is pain, once again. He burns in the bones of his skull, in his ribcage and his chest, the places where the nerves run from his elbows along the underside of his arms, in the tips of his fingers. This time, Izuku doesn't fade to nothing as quickly, doesn't lose awareness, and it's worse for it. Izuku feels the pain build, crest until he feels like he can't possibly be alive after this. He can't move, can't look away, but then Fury blinks and it starts to fade. Fury steps back, dropping Izuku to the ground, and the impact of his body dropping even that short distance is too much. Izuku gasps for breath, blinking and writhing against the floor. His body feels like it's alight, like every inch of his skin and every muscle, every bone is fire and heat. Izuku feels bile rise in his throat, but he swallows it down. He tries to stop twitching, to stop moving against the floor, but he can't order his body to stop shaking.

Izuku remembers what Miura had done for him, last time, and he forces himself to stop clenching his jaw, to stop whimpering under his breath. It's hard, like his body doesn't want to listen, but it brings some relief, even small, to the pain that throbs in his head. He thinks he hears footsteps moving around him, but he still flinches in shock when a pair of cool, gentle hands come to rest on his head, lifting it off of the hard floor and setting it back down on something soft.

"Shh," Miura's voice says, soft and gentle, and Izuku feels the warm, wet rag wipe the sweat from his face, and he relaxes into it. He feels some of the pain lessen, ever so slightly, and he realizes that it's not as bad as last time. He forces himself to breathe in and out, slow, forces himself to stop shaking, stop twitching, and the pain starts to ebb to a manageable level, one where he can think.

"He knew about my quirk," Fury says, voice low and serious from somewhere above Izuku. "How did he know about my fucking quirk?"

"I don't know, Kaz," Miura says, sighing. "When you walk into a room with your eyes shut, it's not so hard to figure it out." Fury hisses, angry.

"He turned around before I walked in, smart ass," he snaps. "You've met this kid before, haven't you? How else would he know my name and quirk?"

Miura sighs, again. "Manami is far more likely to leak that info, you know that," she says. "I haven't told him anything. Manami's the one who's fought him in Hosu."

"But you *have* met him before, haven't you, Sumire?" Fury growls, low and animalistic under his

breath. “Fuck! I hate it when you two do this shit without consulting with me. You’ve fucked it all up, now look at him!”

Miura sighs, brushing Izuku’s hair away from his face. “I don’t think him knowing has anything to do with his pain tolerance, Kazuo. Even if this is an unusual response.” Izuku cracks an eye open, but his view of the world is blurry, like there’s a film over things.

“It’s like he’s gone through it before,” Fury says, and Izuku can see him leaning over where Izuku is on the ground. Izuku sees a flash of gold, and he snaps his eyes shut. Fury chuckles.

“It is,” Miura agrees, something Izuku can’t place in her voice. “He reminds me of Mouse.”

Fury snorts. “Funny you should mention that. I’m going to have her talk to him, when he’s in a state to talk. Then I’ll have another go at him.” Izuku hears a sharp intake of breath from Miura.

“You can’t,” she says. “Give him 24 hours.” Izuku hears Fury snort.

“If he survives that long, I’ll give him 18. You know as well as I do that he’s going to be dead at the end of this, anyway. May as well have my fun while I can,” he says, laughter in his voice.

Miura sighs. “If you wait the full 24, you can have me, too,” she says, defeat in her voice. The words have more meaning to them, now that Izuku knows what he does, now that he’s coherent enough to process them. He feels a shiver run down his spine at the thought of Miura subjecting herself to Fury’s quirk *willingly*.

“Seriously?” Fury asks, sounding surprised. “You’ve got a deal, Sumire. I’ll send Mouse in in what, twelve hours?”

Miura sighs. “That should be okay,” she says, softly. Izuku hears footsteps, hears a door open and shut and then he hears Miura speak again. “I’m sorry,” she whispers, a cool hand brushing the bruised skin on his throat. “I should never have let it get to this point.”

“S okay,” Izuku mumbles, blinking his eyes. He can focus more than last time, although not by much. “Who’s Mouse?” he asks, and Miura sighs.

“She’s Kazuo’s current project,” she says, and Izuku *really* doesn’t like the sound of that. “Don’t lie to her, when she comes.” Miura smooths a hand over his face. “You need to rest, now.”

“Mhmm,” Izuku hums. “Miura?” he asks, and he feels her stiffen beside him. “Not your fault,” he says.

“Thank you,” Miura murmurs. “But it is.” Izuku blinks, sleepily, but he can’t force himself to stay awake any longer. He drifts away into darkness.

--

Izuku wakes up to a dark room. He’s in that same futon, but the ache in his head isn’t quite so pressing, quite so distracting. When he blinks his eyes open, sitting up, there’s the exact same water bottle and protein bar by the doorway. If Izuku wasn’t more than used to resetting by this point, he’d have *deja vu*.

This time, Izuku pulls himself to his feet, moving slowly and carefully. It’s difficult, and his legs are like jelly, but he can do it, can balance enough to hobble over to the doorway on his own two feet. The water helps, sliding down his throat and cooling some of the aching in his gut. Izuku drinks half of the bottle, then carries it and the protein bar over to his futon, sitting down on top of

it and tearing open the wrapper to the protein bar. It's strange, eating it again when he'd eaten it not long ago, but he eats it in a few quick bites, anyway. He drinks the rest of the water afterward, swishing the last mouthful around to get the last traces of the artificial taste out of his mouth, and then he sets the bottle and wrapper down and takes a deep, slow breath.

He can see a tiny red light in the camera in the corner of the room, so he knows that he's being watched, but this time, Miura doesn't come in to talk to him. Izuku isn't sure how long he sits there, just waiting in the emptiness of the room, but it can't be more than an hour or two. The door handle clicks quietly, and Izuku's head shoots up to watch as the door opens, light spilling into the room, and a small figure is pushed inside. Izuku blinks, standing, and the door is shut. The lights flicker on after that, and Izuku finds himself staring at the person in front of him.

She's... small. Izuku guesses that she can't be much older than five or six, about three and a half feet tall, he'd guess. Her hair is short, brown, and curly, clipped messily so that it hangs uneven and choppy around her jaws and ears. Her skin is tanned and dirty, scuffed up in the corners, and she's wearing a pair of cargo shorts that are far too big for her, cinched on with a length of rope. Her shirt, a white t-shirt that hangs off of her tiny form, does nothing to hide the marks on her arms, the repeating circular burns. *Cigarette butts*, Izuku realizes. *They're scars from cigarettes.*

"...Mouse?" Izuku asks, carefully. She's standing just in front of the door, her fingers twisted in her shirt and her gaze trained on the ground. She's shaking, ever so slightly, but when Izuku says that name, she glances up, bottom lip wobbling.

"Mouse," she repeats, nodding jerkily. "You can't lie to me." She gestures at her chest with a tiny hand. "Not allowed. Bad."

Izuku blinks, then nods. "Okay," he says, and Mouse breathes a little sigh of relief. She fumbles with the pocket of her shorts for a moment, producing a small piece of folded white paper. She unfolds it, carefully, and she holds it in front of her.

"I ask questions," she says, glancing up from the paper at Izuku. "I ask questions from Mr. Kazuo." She nods, then tips her head at Izuku, and he realizes that she's waiting for a confirmation.

"That's okay," Izuku says, trying to keep his voice something soothing, even though the lights have brought back his headache. "You can ask me whatever you need to."

Mouse nods, seriously, then looks down at the paper. "What is your full name?" she asks, and Izuku is frankly surprised that she can read at all.

"Izuku Midoriya," he answers, and she must have some kind of quirk that tells her if he's lying, because he watches tension bleed out of her shoulders.

"How did you know Mr. Kazuo's name?" she asks. She looks up at Izuku when she does, and he thinks he sees a hint of something red flashing in the irises of her eyes, but he thinks it could be a trick of the light.

"He told me," Izuku says, which is true. Mouse nods, glancing down at the paper. Izuku wonders what the grime that covers her is--it's dark grey and black, not brown like dirt would be. She's coated in the stuff, on her clothing and her fingers, and it prickles something in the back of Izuku's mind, but he can't place it. She smells like cigarettes and woodsmoke.

"How did you know Mr. Kazuo's quirk?" she asks, and Izuku bites at his lower lip, because that's complicated.

“I know it from multiple things,” he says, which is as true as it gets. “He used it on me,” he adds and Mouse’s eyes widen.

“Mr. Kazuo’s quirk hurts bad,” she says, nodding quickly. “I hurt when he uses it.” Izuku swallows, something dark and painful rising at that.

“I’m sorry, Mouse,” he says, and he wishes he could do something, *anything* , to help her. She turns her eyes back to the paper.

“What is your quirk?” she asks, glancing up at him. Izuku swallows. He doesn’t know what her quirk does, exactly, but he has to take a risk and hope that this works like it did with Tsukauchi.

“I’m quirkless,” he says, because he is a quirkless *person* , and Mouse shakes her head. Izuku feels a pang of fear in his gut, but she opens her mouth and starts to speak.

“Next question is stupid,” she says. “Next question is stupid if you’re quirkless.” She clutches the little piece of paper. “Have you used your quirk while in this facility?” She says the word facility easily, like she’s said it a hundred times before, even though she seems to struggle to put basic sentences together, and Izuku hates the fact that he notices. Maybe it’s because of that, because of the way his heart is twisting in his chest at the sight of the burns, the *fresh* burns on her forearms, that he answers automatically, without thinking.

“No,” he says, and he knows immediately that he’s messed up. Mouse’s gaze snaps up to him, and her previously dark eyes are glowing, flickering in red and yellow and orange like a candle flame.

“No,” she says, shaking her head. “You can’t lie to me. Mouse is not a good person to lie to,” she says, dropping the paper and scrambling over to him. Izuku blinks, confused, because she seems so panicked. He takes a breath in, and that’s when he realizes what’s wrong. It feels like he’s back in the woods, breathing in the smoky air, itching and stinging in his lungs, and Izuku coughs on reflex. A small puff of grey smoke comes from his mouth, quickly dissipating in the air, and Mouse shakes her head again, violently.

“No, no, no!” she whines, grabbing the front of his sweatshirt and twisting her little, ash covered hands in it. *Soot*, Izuku realizes, *she’s covered in soot* . He can feel it in his chest, now, a thick, burning heat that burns in his ribs and his sternum. The pain is almost a joke, compared to Fury’s quirk, but when Izuku breathes in, it’s like the air feeds hot coals in his lungs. Izuku coughs, sputters, and this time, he sees cherry-red embers float into the air, the same color as Mouse’s glowing eyes. Izuku tries to take in another breath, but there’s no relief, no oxygen that reaches his blood, not judging by the way his vision has started to blur. Izuku falls onto his side, coughing and spluttering into the cloth of the futon, black soot coating everything in front of him. His chest aches, burns with fire on the inside, and Izuku shuts his eyes and waits to die.

--

Izuku blinks his eyes open once more in that same place, in the empty room with the cream walls and the dirty old linoleum. He stands quickly, relishing the fact that he’s not in pain, the fact that his lungs fill easily with air, the way that he can move, easily. He’s on his feet, turned to face the back of the room, when the doorknob clicks.

“Furuya,” he says, before Fury has a chance to greet him. He hears the door click shut.

“Oh?” Fury says, a hint of amusement in his voice. “It seems my reputation precedes me. I don’t believe we’ve met, Midoriya.”

“Maybe not from your perspective,” Izuku says, shutting his eyes. “Say, you think I’m quirkless, don’t you?”

“That’s what our intel says,” Fury replies, voice carefully schooled. “But I’m guessing that’s not the case.” Izuku hears the clicking of his shoes against the floor. “Is it?”

“No,” Izuku says, swallowing. “It isn’t. I know you’re planning to kill me, but I would advise against it.” He takes a deep breath. “Your quirk, Heaven and Hell. You can’t turn it off, can you?”

Fury’s footsteps stop. “What?” he asks. “How do you...?” Fury sighs. “Who leaked it to you?” His voice is resigned, heavy with irritation.

“You did, technically,” Izuku says. “If you don’t believe me, make Mouse question me instead. That’ll get you what you want, right?” He schools his features, forces himself to look unafraid. Determined.

“You know about Mouse,” Fury says. “Hm. What is your supposed quirk?”

Izuku shrugs. “I’d prefer to tell your boss about that, to be honest,” he says.

Fury hisses out a breath of air. “Fine,” he snaps. “But she’s busy, right now. You’ll speak with the brat first.” Izuku hears footsteps, hears the door open, and he opens his eyes. The cream colored wall is in front of him, and as he hears the door click shut, he turns, cautiously. He keeps his eyes down and half lidded, but even once he’s turned and slowly looked up, there’s nobody there.

Izuku waits, pacing back and forth in that plain room, for what must be hours. After a few minutes pass, he starts to count, slow and even along with his breaths, but he soon loses track of even that. Instead, he thinks.

Izuku knows, deep down, that this is bad. He thinks that some part of his brain is keeping him from processing it, from understanding what’s going on, but he knows he’s caught, and that resetting isn’t taking him back far enough to get out. He knows that he’s been tortured--that he’ll probably be tortured again. He knows that he’s not the only captive. Izuku can remember that the Gekkeiju have Avenging Angel, and he doubts there’s any way that Mouse is anything *but* a captive, not with those burns and the way she acted.

Izuku doesn’t want to think about a lot of things, but Mouse... Izuku bites his lip as he paces in his little room, turning on his heels and lining his steps up, toe to heel. She’d been asking him questions from the piece of paper she’d given him, but Izuku can’t recall her asking any questions other than those, even when she’d clearly wanted some kind of a response from him. *A quirk that requires a direct question and response, then?* He wonders. Izuku thinks, to the fact that he’d technically lied when he’d said he was quirkless, but it hadn’t triggered her quirk. *It could be like Tsukauchi’s quirk, where the fact that I’m technically quirkless, if only legally, is enough, but I wonder. Could it be because I didn’t answer her question? She asked what my quirk was, not if I was quirkless or not.*

Izuku takes a deep breath. He starts mapping in his mind, too. He’s on the second basement level, and the building has seven above ground floors. The elevators just down the hall only lead to the first floor, which is some sort of lobby. There’s windows, so nothing too private could take place there, but Manami still hadn’t hesitated to kill him. He wonders if the glass could be one way, if on the outside, it looks like mirrors.

Izuku wonders about a lot of things. He wonders why he hasn’t seen Miura yet, this reset. He wonders when Mouse will come, what questions they’ll ask. He wonders how a little girl like her

could end up in a place like this. He wonders why he hasn't reached his limit yet. After all, he's reset four times now, hasn't he? Shouldn't he have a headache? Izuku thinks that maybe, in comparison to the pain from Fury's quirk, he just can't feel the pain of his quirk any more. He hopes that's not the case. He hopes, desperately, that his training is just paying off.

--

It's after hours of pacing, walking back and forth until his feet are sore, that the doorknob clicks. Izuku glances up to see Miura, wearing the same clothing from before, step inside. She's wearing her mask, that simple piece of metal--of lead--that covers her face, hides her healing bruises. Izuku wonders, now, how he'd never recognized her before, even with it on. She still looks like herself, after all, even with her face hidden.

"It's time," she says, voice even and low. She opens the door, holding it, and Izuku tips his head to the side.

"I'm going to her?" he asks, and Miura nods.

"You are," she confirms. "Come." she turns, walking out of the room, and Izuku hurries to follow her. They turn the opposite direction from where Izuku knows the elevators are, walking down the hallway at an even pace. It's so different from the last time Izuku had made it to this point, to when he'd been draped over Miura's back, in agony.

"Miura," he says, softly. Miura jerks to a stop in front of him, turning to look at him.

"You figured it out," she says, sighing. "I should have expected that. You're a smart kid." Izuku watches her reach up, watches the mask color with soft violet light, before she pulls it from her face. She looks tired in a way she hadn't last time, the bruises under her eyes seeming almost darker.

"Thank you," Izuku says, suddenly. "I know that, if things were different, you would..." he swallows as she turns away from him to look down the hall. "Thank you," he repeats.

"You shouldn't thank me for something I haven't even done," she says, starting to move forward again. Izuku follows her, walks just a few steps behind her until they're at the end of the hall, at the very last door. There's a child's drawing hung on the outside of it, just beside the doorknob, and it shows five stick figures. One is tiny, with a swirl of brown for hair and red eyes, and Izuku thinks it must be Mouse. There are four adult figures, too--one with long black hair pulled back low, one with short red hair and sunglasses that cover his eyes, and one with long red hair in pigtails and cuts all over her thighs, and one with big black wings and brown ram's horns that poke out from jaw length black hair. The figures are all holding hands, but only the one that Izuku thinks is supposed to be Manami is smiling, and the little Mouse, drawn in crayon, is crying scribbled-on turquoise tears. Izuku tears his eyes away from the drawing as Miura slides a key into the doorknob and unlocks it before twisting the knob and pushing the door open.

"Mousey?" Miura calls, her voice gentle. "It's Sumire." She steps into the room, turning and nodding at Izuku, who follows her in.

The room is the same cream color as the one Izuku'd been in, but it's not empty. In one corner of the room is a twin sized mattress dressed in filthy white sheets, stained with black soot and grey ash. Mouse sits on the bed, a thick black blanket wrapped around her shoulders, and she stares up at them with wide eyes. There's a desk, too, in another corner of the room, with a box of crayons and a stack of paper. Izuku can see a doorway that seems to lead to a bathroom, but the lights are out in it, and all he can make out is the edge of what he thinks is a toilet. *There must either not be a*

bath, or she doesn't know how to bathe , he notes, judging by the streaks of soot covering her and tainting the room. It smells like a campfire.

“Sumire,” Mouse says, pulling the blanket tight around her shoulders. “You brought him for questions.” It’s not phrased as a question, but Miura nods.

“This is Midoriya.” She gestures to him. “Kazuo gave you your questions already, right?” Mouse nods, fumbling within the blanket and producing a folded piece of paper. “Good. I’ll be right outside, okay? Knock if you need help,” she says, a soft smile on her face.

“Kay,” Mouse says, watching with her dark eyes as Miura turns, stepping back through the doorway. Miura glances at Izuku.

“A piece of advice. Don’t lie to her,” Miura says, her eyes shining with something that Izuku thinks might be worry. She steps out of the room, shutting the door behind her, and Izuku takes a deep breath.

“Hi, Mouse,” he says, giving her a small smile. “I’m Izuku Midoriya, but you can call me whatever you’d like, okay?” He meets her gaze, and she nods, slowly.

“Mouse,” she says. “Call me Mouse. I call you Izuku.” She slides forward, creeping off of the bed, the blanket still around her shoulders. “If I call you Izuku,” she says, pauses. Izuku blinks.

“That’s okay!” he says, nodding to her. “You can call me Izuku.” Mouse shuffles forward, standing close to the center of the room.

“I ask questions,” she says, holding the piece of paper up. “I ask questions, and you don’t lie. Please,” she adds, looking up at him. Izuku nods.

“I won’t lie to you. I’ll be okay,” he says, and she blinks, eyes huge.

“Okay,” she says, nodding. She glances down at the paper. “What is your full name?”

“Izuku Midoriya,” Izuku replies, and Mouse nods, jerkily.

“How did you know Mr. Kazuo’s name?” she asks. She peeks up at Izuku, and sure enough, he can see the flash of red in her eyes.

“I know because of my quirk,” Izuku says, which is true. Mouse nods, eyes huge.

“How did you know Mr. Kazuo’s quirk?” she asks, and Izuku is glad that the questions are the same, at least for the most part. It makes it easy to answer.

“Because of my quirk,” he answers, again, and Mouse’s head bobs, up and down.

“What is your quirk?” she asks, eyes pinned on his. Izuku watches the swish of the red light. *Questions are definitely part of the activation.*

“My quirk doesn’t have an official name,” he says, which is absolutely true, if only because Izuku can’t pick a name for the real version of it. “It lets me see how things could happen, if I do certain things.” And really, it does. What’s the difference between seeing the future and going back in time, really?

“Have you used your quirk while in this facility?” Mouse asks. She’s looking up at him with *awe* , and it’s a foreign experience for Izuku. He’s never had a kid look at him like that.

"I have," he says, and her eyes widen.

"Were you sent by anyone to infiltrate this facility?" Mouse asks, stumbling over the word 'infiltrate.' Izuku blinks.

"No," he says. "I was kidnapped. Do they really think I did that on purpose?" Mouse shrugs.

"I was brought here by Maiko-sama," Mouse says. "Maiko-sama bought Mouse and gave me a home." She pauses, her fingers squeezing and wrinkling the paper. "I did not come here on purpose. So I don't think Izuku did, either," she says, eyes huge.

Izuku bites at his lower lip. "It's not your fault you're here, Mouse," he says, gently, and he knows it's the right thing to say when Mouse's eyes widen even further and she takes a few tiny steps closer to him, her head tipped back to look up at him.

"I asked all the questions," Mouse says, quiet. "Sumire will be back soon. Or they will send someone else." She tips her head slightly to the side. "Mouse does not get to ask her own questions. Mouse is dangerous."

"Can I... Can I touch you?" Izuku asks, hesitant. "I want to put a hand on your head." Mouse blinks at him.

"Izuku doesn't need to ask. Mr. Kazuo doesn't ask," she says, looking confused, and Izuku swallows.

"I want to ask," Izuku says, softly. "I don't want to do anything you're not okay with." Mouse's mouth opens, just the tiniest bit, and she nods, her head bobbing jerkily. Izuku moves his hand carefully, slowly, so that Mouse can see every movement, and then he sets his hand on top of her head, in her tangled mess of dark curls. He gently rests his palm and fingers in her hair, and after a moment, Mouse leans into the touch, her eyes still glued to Izuku's. Izuku thinks he gets, now, why Miura was willing to risk her own safety to help him, even though she didn't know him, not really. Izuku can't just look at Mouse and *not* want to save this scared, scarred little girl.

Izuku hears the doorknob click, and he removes his hand from Mouse's head, turning to face the door as it opens. Sure enough, it's Miura, maskless and tired looking. She glances to Mouse.

"All done?" she asks, voice quiet. Mouse nods, and Miura glances to Izuku. "Come on, then. The boss is busy right now, so it might be awhile before she can talk to you." Izuku blinks, then nods. He glances back at Mouse as he follows Miura out of the room, watches as she stares back at him, her face wearing the same wide-eyed look as before. He wishes he could have helped her clean up, before he was asked to leave.

Miura walks him only a short distance down the hall, two rooms down from Mouse's, before stopping in front of a door and unlocking the handle. Izuku blinks.

"It's a different room," he says, and Miura glances over to him, nodding.

"It is," she says, pushing the door open. "It'll be a little more comfortable." She gestures to the inside, which is dark, and Izuku hesitates before walking in. He steps inside, and the door is shut behind him, locking from the sound of it. Izuku bites at his lip, wishing he'd asked a few more questions before she'd left, but now, in the darkness, he's lost his chance. He blinks as his eyes adjust to the dim light, and he realizes that there's a light switch on the wall of this room, with two levers down in the down position. Izuku blinks, flipping them both on, and the lights in the room as well as in a small adjoining bathroom turn on.

Izuku glances around the room. It's much the same in shape as Mouse's, but in lieu of the mattress, there's a futon in one corner of the room, and he doesn't have a desk. There's two bottles of water and what looks like two pouches of applesauce next to the futon, and as Izuku walks across the room, he can see a toilet and a sink in the tiny bathroom. The floor there is tiled white, but the tiles are cracked and stained, old looking like the linoleum. Izuku sighs in the emptiness of the room, walking over to the futon and sitting down. *I might as well get comfortable*, he thinks.

Chapter End Notes

cw: child abuse, torture, vomiting

discord: <https://discord.gg/Vqaj62ceCt>

i hope you all enjoyed!!! thank you for the amazing support <3

oh, and we have art !!! for this fic!! idk how to insert links tbh, but mrsketchy on our discord makes some hella cool stuff that you can see on his tumblr:
<https://mrsketchy.tumblr.com/>

captivity, part 3

Chapter Summary

last time: izuku meets mouse, who is very sad and has a very scary quirk.

Chapter Notes

[actual real link to mrsketchy's art!](#) this is just his tumblr in general, but it's where all his stuff is :3c

IM SO GLAD YALL LOVE MOUSE i would die for her <3 enjoy dis chapter

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Izuku spends most of the time in the room alone and in relative silence. He can hear a steady drip coming from the sink, no matter how many times he walks over to it and tightens the knob toward the off position, but after a while, the noise is actually comforting. Izuku thinks that's because he's been in here for an awfully long time, not that he has any way of tracking things.

He goes through the water and applesauce pretty quick, even though he's trying to save it. His head doesn't hurt, necessarily, but he can tell that he's getting thirsty faster than normal and that he's just the tiniest bit weaker, the tiniest bit quicker to fatigue. Izuku's pretty sure that his quirk backlash is affecting him, after all, and strangely enough, it's a comforting thought rather than a concerning one. After all this time, his quirk has been something he can rely on, more or less, and knowing that even if his limit has changed that the rules haven't is soothing to him.

Izuku rests, mostly. He paces a bit at first, but when it's becoming clear that he's not going anywhere anytime soon, when he's drained the second bottle of water and he's noticed a thin quiver in his fingers when he tries to hold them straight, he tucks himself into the futon and sleeps with his back pressed to the painted brick wall. It's a fitful sleep, and Izuku knows he's too on edge to really, truly rest, but it's something. It's nice to be able to turn his own lights on and off, and he keeps the bathroom light on just so that if someone walks in, he'd be able to identify them quickly. It casts the room in grey shadow, and something about that is so much nicer than the harsh cream walls, the once-white floor. Izuku sleeps off and on like that for a while, and when he wakes, he feels better physically.

It occurs to Izuku that Kacchan probably has it worse than him. Sure, he's been tortured and killed, but Kacchan is the one with the League, the one with the villains that seem less organized and more unhinged. Kacchan doesn't have the practice Izuku does, doesn't have the pain tolerance and the ability to come back from death. Izuku has to stop himself from thinking about it, because when he imagines his childhood friend, tied up or half decayed or writhing in pain, a thick panic rises in his throat, choking him. Izuku can't afford to break down, not here.

Izuku thinks about Mouse instead, which is arguably worse, but it's something he's close enough to do something about. He thinks about the way she'd drawn some of the Gekkeiju members and herself, the way she'd been 'bought' by whoever Maiko is. Izuku's heard of quirk trafficking, of

course, but as a quirkless child, it had seemed so distant. So far apart from Izuku, who had bruises and burns because he *didn't* have a quirk.

Izuku hates that he can see exactly what a villain group would want with Mouse. More than Tsukauchi, even, her quirk would give them a way to ensure honesty, a way to guarantee cooperation. Izuku wonders how many people they've made Mouse kill. He wonders how many people Mouse has watched die.

Izuku thinks that the isolation might be getting to him right around the point where he's gotten too hungry to sleep any more. He sits on the futon, his hands fisted in the fabric, and he doesn't let himself cry. He feels the tears start to prick up in the corners of his eyes, feels the heat building in his chest, but his mind feels empty. Blank. Izuku doesn't know why he's crying, but he knows he can't, not here. Not with the Gekkeiju watching. His survival replies on his ability to convince them he isn't weak and useless, after all, and crying is something he only does because he's weak. Izuku isn't stupid, and he can see the little red light of a camera in the corner of the room, pointed so it'll get the bathroom in the shot, too.

Izuku can't cry, can't break down, so he sits on the futon and folds his arms over his chest so that his fingers and thumbs can dig into the healing cuts just below his elbows. The fabric of the sweatshirt he's wearing is just soft enough that the bite isn't quite what he wants, but he doesn't dare pull his sleeves up. Izuku sits on the futon, breathing in and out slowly, carefully, and he focuses on the bright pain that blooms where he digs his fingertips into his skin.

Izuku loses track of time, but the door opens and a brown paper bag is pushed in at some point. Izuku scrambles to the door to see who it is, but they're shutting it and locking it behind them before he gets the chance. Instead, Izuku picks up the bag. It's strangely heavy, and when Izuku glances inside, there are three water bottles, a protein bar, an apple, and two convenience store onigiri. Izuku takes everything out of the bag and sets it down beside his futon before eating. It's not enough to quite fill his stomach, which tells him he's been in this room for longer than it seems, but it's something. Izuku drinks one of the water bottles and sets the other two aside before he tries, once again, to sleep some of the time away.

When the door opens the next time, Izuku is awake and sitting up on the futon, practicing his English in his head. It hasn't been going very well, probably because Izuku doesn't have any of his notes or something to write on, but it means that he's alert and already facing the door when he hears the knob click as it's unlocked. He glances up to see Fury, his red hair bright even in the dim light, and he's wearing dark, practically black sunglasses that cover both of his eyes. Izuku slams his eyes shut as soon as he realizes who it is, and he hears Fury snort softly.

"It doesn't work through the sunglasses," he says. "Thought you'd know that."

"I guessed, but it's better safe than sorry with your quirk," Izuku says, cracking one eye open cautiously. Fury is dressed in a dark navy suit with a white undershirt and a crimson tie that makes his red hair stand out even brighter. He steps into the room just a few steps, his shoes clicking on the floor.

"It's time," Fury says. "We'll meet up with Manami, and then you're going to meet the boss. Consider yourself lucky--not many people get to talk to her so easily." He turns, starting to walk back out of the room, and Izuku stands, scrambling to follow after him. He notices that Fury doesn't lock the door behind him, doesn't even shut it, and Izuku tugs it closed himself before following Fury to where he knows the elevators are.

Izuku can feel his heart pounding in his ears as Fury presses the elevator call button before sliding his hands into the pockets of his slacks, waiting with a bored look on his face. Izuku situates

himself so that Fury's sunglasses block all of his eyes, and it helps with the way his throat is growing tight, but only a little. Fury glances up at him, and Izuku can just barely see his eyes narrowing behind the sunglasses.

"You act like you've felt it before," Fury says, voice low, curious. "The pain aspect of my quirk, that is." Izuku watches the line of his shoulders, relaxed and at ease. *Fury isn't intimidated by me in the slightest*, Izuku realizes. *He's confident that he could take me alone, even without knowing my quirk*.

"If things had gone differently, I would have felt it," Izuku answers, breathing out slowly through the sentence. Fury shrugs, humming under his breath.

"Hmm. You're a strange one, that's for sure," he says, his voice almost a chuckle. The elevator beeps softly, and Izuku watches as the doors slide open. Fury jerks his head at the elevator cabin, and Izuku blinks before stepping inside. Fury follows after him, pressing the first floor button with a pale knuckle. Izuku can see scars there, the kind you get from punching people in the teeth or from your fists colliding with something hard. Fighting scars. Izuku has some that match, but his are pale and pink on the surface of his skin, and Fury's are almost blood red. His skin is paler than Izuku's, but he seems to scar in raised red lines, too, which Izuku does not. Izuku tears his gaze away, stares at the elevator doors instead.

The elevator comes to a stop and it beeps electronically at them before the doors slide open. Izuku steps out, first, and Fury follows close behind, moving to walk ahead of Izuku as they walk out into the lobby Izuku'd been in that first time.

Yamamoto is still behind the desk, but her hair is styled differently. Izuku can't actually *remember* what it'd been like the first time through, but now it's in a neat braid. She glances up briefly from her computer when they step into the room.

"Lord Fury," she says. "Should I send word up?" Her fingers hover over the keys, and Fury nods.

"Tell her that Manami, Midoriya, and I will be up shortly," he says, then turns, glancing around the lobby. Izuku finds his own eyes wandering to the television that had been on last time, and sure enough, the news is on.

The headline painted across the bottom of the screen reads, "Kamino Aftermath--Symbol of Peace passes on the torch?" in bright bold letters, and Izuku finds he can't tear his eyes away from it. He watches as the screen cycles through a number of images, images of a skeletal All Might and of Kacchan, bound and struggling. Images of Kirishima, Iida, Todoroki, Yaoyorozu, Kendou, and Monoma pulling Kacchan away from Kurogiri and Shigaraki, images of a man with a strange headpiece standing and facing All Might. Images of Mirio, wearing his costume with a bright smile on his face, standing at All Might's side. Images of Eraserhead holding Kacchan, escorting him into an ambulance. Images of other pro heroes, some injured and some well, some *dead*. Izuku stares at the screen, and everything else bleeds away. The scene at Kamino is dark, with embers that drift like red fireflies through the ruins. Izuku feels strange, looking at it.

According to the date on the screen, Izuku has been at the Gekkeiju's facility for a little over three days. He feels sick to his stomach as he watches the reporter on screen talk, her mouth moving without a single sound coming out. Izuku can see Fury watching him, out of the corner of his eyes, but it doesn't matter. Izuku takes a few steps closer to the screen, close enough to read the subtitles. He sees Manami poke her head up from one of the couches, this time with her hair in pigtails as usual, but he doesn't spare her a glance.

"*All Might has announced his retirement, stating that he will be teaching and training his*

successor, Lemillion, full time. What this means for hero society remains unclear, but after Lemillion's heroic takedown of multiple members of the notorious League of Villains, including two 'Noumu' and the man who appears to be leading the operation, citizens have hope. ” The reporter smiles, eyes crinkling up with the motion, and then her face becomes more serious. “ *To continue the story with U.A. High, school officials have reported that all students present at the Kamino Incident are alive and will make full recoveries. The school has declined to comment on the status of the investigation regarding the second missing student, identified as Izuku Midoriya, who has yet to be recovered. While it is unclear at this juncture, some have begun to speculate that Midoriya has been killed. After a kidnapping, the highest chances of survival are typically between--* ”

“Hey,” Fury says, his fingers snapping in front of Izuku's face and startling him out of his fixation on the screen. “It's time,” he says, and when Izuku turns to look at him, there's clear annoyance on his face.

“Kazuo's getting impatient,” Manami adds, and Izuku blinks in surprise to see that she's no longer on the couch, instead standing just ahead of them, by a corridor Izuku hasn't been down. “He's such a bad big brother. Kazuo, don't you know the younger sibling is supposed to be the one who rushes things? You're supposed to be calm and collected!” She grins wide, giggling, but Izuku can see that her eyes aren't hearts, and he can also hear the fondness in her voice. He glances to Fury and watches as he sighs, rolling his eyes so dramatically that Izuku would be able to tell that's what he was doing even if Izuku couldn't kind of see through his sunglasses.

“Yeah, yeah, just start blabbing our whole family tree to the prisoner,” he grumbles, walking forward with a quick glance back at Izuku. “Follow.” It's a clear order, and Izuku doesn't hesitate, even though his eyes slip back to the television for just a moment. He wonders if his mom is watching the same broadcast. Wonders if she's the one that gave his name to the media, since he doesn't think that UA or Kacchan would have.

“Well, it's kind of obvious, anyway,” Manami says, twirling a finger around in one of her ponytails. She's dressed differently than Izuku's ever seen her before, wearing calf-high black leather boots and blood red knee highs with black stripes at the top. She's wearing a black dress that comes to just above her knees, and over it, a deep red blazer. Izuku can see that there are black bows tied up in her pigtails, and he wonders if there's a special occasion or if this villain group is just really fond of formal clothes. Izuku gets what she means about it being obvious, too--he's surprised he didn't put it together sooner, really. Fury and Manami look alike, with the only real difference being that Manami is about Izuku's height and has tan skin, while Fury is tall and pale.

“Should we give him our blood types and dates of birth while we're at it, too?” Fury asks, sarcasm thick in his voice. Manami just laughs, shaking her head as they walk along the corridor. Izuku can see elevators at the end, these ones with smoother, more polished doors than the ones that went to the basement. There are two, again, and only one button--these must not go down to the basement. Manami presses the button, first, and something occurs to Izuku.

“Does it have to be your hands that touch you, to activate your quirk?” he asks, and Fury whips his head around to glare at him. “Or if you crossed your legs and the skin of your knees touched, would that do it?”

“Oh, well--” Manami starts, looking back at him with wide eyes and a big smile, but Fury cuts her off.

“Don't answer that,” he snaps. “Midoriya, you'd do well to keep your mouth shut. Don't forget the position you're in here.” His gaze rakes over Izuku's body, his golden eye appearing almost hazel

behind the dark glasses. “Even without my quirk, I could make you hurt so badly you wished you were dead.”

Izuku nods, but it takes a little bit of effort for him not to crack a joke at that. He’s not going to tell Fury that it doesn’t really take much for him to wish he was dead. Instead, he follows after Manami as she steps into the elevator, all too aware of Fury close behind him. The elevator is large enough that they all have a fair amount of space between them, and Izuku watches as Fury presses the button for the seventh floor. It’s the last button on the panel, confirming what Miura had told him. The elevator chimes softly, and they start to rise, Izuku’s body shifting slightly with the motion.

“Were you wondering if they were looking for you?” Fury asks as they rise, and Izuku glances over at him.

“I-I wanted to know if my friends were okay,” Izuku answers, confused, and Fury just snorts.

“I don’t even think they’re actually investigating or whatever,” Fury says, his eyes sliding over to the side, a smirk on his lips. “I mean, they think you’re quirkless, right? Why would they try to get you back?” He chuckles, low under his breath, his eyes moving back to face the elevator door.

Izuku swallows. “They’re my friends,” he says, defending himself. “They care about me.”

“Sure,” Fury says, shrugging. “I don’t know that much about the quirkless, really. You’d know better than me. I just thought that people wouldn’t like you very much. Maybe they’d be polite, since it’s easier that way, but they wouldn’t *really* want a quirkless person around.” He shrugs again. “Like I said, I wouldn’t really know. But I thought that might be why nobody’s even looking for you.”

“Nobody’s...?” Izuku blinks, then shuts his mouth. The elevator dings softly, the doors sliding open to reveal the seventh floor, and Izuku hears a soft snort of amusement from Fury as he steps out ahead of Izuku, out of the elevator.

The seventh floor looks, for all intents and purposes, like some kind of luxury office or apartment. Izuku isn’t really familiar with either of those things, but the elevator opens out into a wide corridor that ends about thirty feet in front of them with large floor to ceiling windows and a sitting area with ivory colored couches. The ground here is polished, red-brown wood, and the walls are painted a slate grey. There are a number of doors to the left, but only one on the wall to the right. Potted plants with thick, glossy green leaves flank the elevators on either side, and Izuku can see hanging baskets full of ivy and something that blooms a bright yellow hanging by the windows. There are paintings hung on the walls, landscapes of wheat fields and thick, verdant jungles, still lifes of pears and apples and oranges, and a painting of an angel with large, tawny wings, herding sheep. Fury walks forward confidently, and Izuku follows hesitantly, Manami trailing behind him. He opens the first door on the left side, twisting the knob and pulling the door open. Izuku follows him inside.

The room is fairly large, with a large blue and white rug that covers most of the hardwood floor. There’s a red-brown leather couch facing the door, just in front of another floor to ceiling window, and both of the other walls are completely covered with bookshelves that display hundreds of books of varying colors and sizes. A low coffee table sits in front of the couch, and across from the couch, closer to the door, is a long ottoman, upholstered with the same dark leather. Potted flowers, blooming red and yellow and gold, sit in a pair of urns in the back of the room, against the window. Izuku can see the city through it, bright and bustling.

Sitting on the couch, with a large pair of black and gold feathered wings sprouting from her back and a pair of twisted, golden-brown ram’s horns growing from her temples, is a woman. She looks

about the same age as Midnight, if Izuku had to guess, and she has jaw length black hair cut in a neat bob and tanned skin. She's wearing a loose black tank top that reveals the strong, thick muscle on her shoulders and forearms, and there's golden chains decorating her throat and arms, twisting and curling around her. She's wearing a skirt that's shorter in the front than it is in the back, a deep, rich olive green fabric that looks like it's layered. She wears golden chains on her ankles, too, and Izuku can see that she's wearing black sandals.

If anything, even more than the golden jewelry, even more than the wings and the horns, the part of her that stands out the most is her eyes. They're a bright, acidic yellow-green, and Izuku can tell even in the bright light that they're glowing, shining and putting out light like a glowstick. Her pupils are rectangular, like that of a goat, and she watches Izuku with half lidded eyes and a smile that crinkles the edges of her eyes slightly.

"Izuku Midoriya," she purrs. "Have a seat." She gestures to the ottoman, and Izuku hears the door shut behind him--probably Manami's doing. He swallows, thickly. Something in his mind is setting off alarm bells just being around her; he feels like a mouse approaching an eagle. Her eyes track him as he shuffles past Fury, walking carefully and slowly over to the ottoman. He sits on the edge of it, directly across him, and she sighs contentedly, her smile curling further up her face.

"I presume you haven't heard of me," she says, and Izuku can hear a slight American accent in her voice, even though she *looks* Japanese. "My name is Maiko Sasaki. I am the mother of the Gekkeiju." She leans back on the couch, folding her hands together and resting them on top of her crossed legs, watching Izuku. Izuku gets the sense that she's waiting for him to speak, but he isn't sure what, exactly, he's meant to say here.

"I-It's nice to meet you," he stutters out, unsure. Her eyebrows raise slightly, her eyes crinkling.

"It's lovely to meet you as well," she says. "It's so nice to meet someone who doesn't forget their manners." She leans forward slightly, sitting up straight. "I would like to hear about your quirk. Kazuo has told me you have quite the interesting one."

Izuku nods, hesitantly. "It's, um." He pauses, takes a breath. "What do you want to know?" he asks, instead. *She's trying to get me to give information, he realizes. She thinks she'll get a broader response if she doesn't ask a simple question.*

She stares at him with half lidded eyes. "Start with the basics," she says. "Tell me what your quirk does." Izuku doesn't think she's blinked even once since he entered the room.

Izuku takes a deep breath. "I can see potential futures," he says. "Mulligan--that's what I've named it--lets me choose to see a potential future when I'm in danger." He sticks with the description he's given to Aizawa, just in case the Gekkeiju had somehow gotten a hold of that information. Sasaki tips her head to the side, just slightly, her mouth a soft 'o' shape.

"In danger?" She brings a hand to her chin, the pad of her thumb resting on the bottom of her lower lip. "How much danger would you need to be in?" Her teeth are sharp, Izuku realizes. If he wasn't so nervous, he might wonder about what on earth kind of mutation quirk she has.

"M-Mortal danger," Izuku says, swallows. "There needs to be a risk of me dying." He feels his heart beat pick up, feels a prickle of nerves as Sasaki's lips spread into a wide smile that shows her too-sharp teeth. She moves the hand that had been on her chin, reaching behind her, and she pulls out a pistol, pointing it directly at Izuku's head. She grips it with one hand first, then the second, her fingers wrapping around her first hand. Izuku can see her finger on the trigger, her elbows slightly bent as she holds the pistol aimed at his head.

“Is this enough?” She asks, laughter in his voice. “I think we should play a little game, Midoriya. Prove that you’re not lying about having a quirk. Tell me what I’m about to say.” She grins wide, her eyes nearly shut from the way her smile presses them up, her teeth, sharp and feline, showing. Izuku stares, wide eyed, as he feels his stomach drop to the floor.

“T-That’s not--” he swallows. “I-I don’t know,” he says, shaking his head, raising his hands up by his head. “That’s not how it works.”

Sasaki nods, a thoughtful look on her face, then she turns the pistol slightly to the side and fires a shot, the sound of the gun firing rattling Izuku’s ears and making him flinch as he feels the bullet fly past his head, only a foot or so to the left of him. He turns, sees the bullet hole in the door they’d come from. Fury and Manami, where they stand in the back of the room, look unconcerned, although Fury is covering his ears and grimacing at the noise.

“Is that better?” Sasaki asks, and Izuku looks back to her as the gun is once again pointed at his head. “Is it dangerous enough, yet? Tell me what I’m going to tell *you* .”

Izuku takes a deep breath, the movement shaky and uneven in his lungs. “I-I can’t,” he says, almost a whisper, and Sasaki sighs.

“Well, that’s a real shame,” she says, her eyebrows furrowing and turning up in the middle, a sad smile on her face. “I’ll tell you anyway, before I kill you. It’s only polite, isn’t it? Plus, if you hadn’t been lying about your quirk, you’d need me to be willing to say it no matter what you said, I imagine.” She grins again, then stands up, the gun pointing at Izuku, calm and steady, even as she gets to her feet.

Sasaki *towers* over him, her wings spreading slightly. “My quirk,” she says, “is not my wings, my horns, or my eyes.” She tilts her head up and back, her eyes narrowing until they’re almost shut. “My quirk is called Imposition. I think it’s a fairly mean name, all things conflicted, but they almost named it Infliction, which would have been worse.” She shuts her eyes for just a second, huffs out a small laugh, and stares Izuku straight in the eyes.

“I could do a lot of things to you, Izuku Midoriya. I could give you the feeling of any number of sensations. I could *impose* upon you any of the many things I’ve experienced.” She blows out a breath, and it whistles, slightly, in her teeth. “But I have a favorite,” she says. “My moniker overseas was inspired by it. I wouldn’t expect you to have heard of me, unless you know anybody in America.” She smiles, tipping her head to the side, and Izuku is suddenly very, very warm.

It doesn’t come on slowly, not like Fury’s quirk. Izuku is normal one moment, and the next, he is filled with a crushing, intense heat. His heart beats too fast in his chest, and he’s breathing too fast, far too fast, and he can see his skin flushing red when he looks down at his hands. His vision is swirling and moving, and he can smell something strange--clean and green, like a freshly mown lawn or cut hay.

“How do you like it?” Sasaki asks, and Izuku looks up at her, confused. How did he like what? Why does he feel so bad, all of a sudden? Izuku just wants a drink of water.

“‘S hot,” he says, blinking. Sasaki smiles, shrugs. She’s pointing a gun at him, and Izuku finds himself staring down the barrel.

“That’s heatstroke,” Sasaki says. “I was on a farm in the summertime, when it happened to me. That’s why you can smell the hay.” She tips her head, breathes out evenly. “That’s why they called me Phosgene, over in the states. I think it has a nice ring to it, don’t you?” Her eyes are too bright for Izuku to look at, even as he squints, his eyes burning like he’s in bright sunlight. He feels too

hot, his skin itchy, and then he feels normal, again. The sensation is gone as quickly as it'd appeared, and Izuku blinks, staring at Sasaki.

"Imposition," he breathes. "Infliction. You can inflict things you've felt on other people?" he asks, eyes wide, and Sasaki brightens, grinning again.

"You're a smart one, aren't you?" She sighs, rolling her shoulders back with the motion. "Too bad you have to die. Bye bye, Midoriya," she says, and Izuku hears another gunshot. He feels something like a hot, tugging fire in his forehead, and then nothing at all.

Chapter End Notes

cw: nothing special i don't think? a little torture

[discord!](#)

THANK YOU ALL SO MUCH!!!! im so glad that yall are sticking with this fic even as it deviates so heavily from canon! i promise that there will be characters other than the OCs and izuku again soon!!! this arc is just pretty much exclusively gekkeiju + izuku for.... obvious reasons....

also! im probably gonna make a carrd for this fic soon that includes a bunch of fanart ppl have done as well as a timeline + my links :3c

captivity, part 4

Chapter Summary

last time: izuku meets a very scary lady who shoots him and tells him some cool and fun facts about herself

Chapter Notes

HI GAMERS school got canceled again bc it's fuckin COLD here and all I've done today is nothing <3

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Izuku opens his eyes to the click of a doorknob and the feeling of tangled, greasy hair in his hand. He blinks, pulling his hand away, and the way the tips of his fingers tingle and the fine bones of his head start to ache tells him that he's running out of tries. Mouse is in front of him, staring up at him with her huge, wet eyes as Izuku turns to face Miura.

"Miura," he says, before she can ask if they're done. "I need to speak with Sasaki." Miura blinks, her brows furrowing slightly, and her eyes shift behind Izuku, to Mouse.

"Mousey?" she asks, voice soft, but with a warning underneath. "What did you tell him, kiddo?" Mouse blinks, but Izuku answers.

"She didn't tell me anything," he says. "I used my quirk. I need to talk to Sasaki *now*. It can't wait a few days." He takes a deep, steadying breath and looks Miura in the eyes. Her dark eyes stare back at him, searching for something in his gaze.

"Okay," she says. "She really is busy right now, though. I'll speak with Kazuo and Manami and see what I can arrange." She twists her mouth slightly, then breathes out a small breath of air, turning to the door. "You'll need to wait for now, though," she says, casting a glance over her shoulder, her low pigtails shifting with the motion. Izuku follows her as she leads him out of the room, giving Mouse a small smile and a wave as he does. She watches him, face expressionless, as the door closes behind him and Miura turns to lock it.

"What do you need to speak with her about?" Miura asks, serious but quiet, soft in the hallway as she tugs the keys out of the lock. She turns to him, head tilted slightly, and Izuku finds himself staring at the healing bruises on her face.

"I-I want to make a deal," Izuku says, swallowing back against the way his heart starts to flutter ever-so-slightly in his chest. "I have some information that could be of use to her." Miura's eyes narrow the slightest bit, then she sighs, turning and walking forward. Izuku follows after her.

"Something *is* going on right now that requires her attention," Miura says as she leads Izuku to the room she'd put him in last time, unlocking the door and pushing it open. "I can get you an audience with her today, though, if I tell her about you being Ace." Izuku tips his head to the side slightly at

her, blinking.

“She doesn’t know? I thought you would have told her,” he says, and Miura sighs, her gaze dropping to the floor.

“It wasn’t necessary to report at the time,” she says, quietly. “Someone will come get you in an hour or two.” Izuku steps inside the room, turning back to look at Miura, expecting her to close the door. She stands there, though, backlit from the light in the hallway, chewing on her bottom lip.

“Miura?” Izuku asks, and she purses her lips, shaking her head.

“How far into the future can you see, with your quirk?” she asks. “I just... there’s something I’m wondering about.” She looks up from the floor, meeting Izuku’s eyes. Izuku blinks.

“Not very far,” he says. “A few days, at the most.” He gives her a small smile. “I’m sorry,” he offers, and she shakes her head.

“Don’t be,” she says, and she steps out of the room, shutting the door behind her. Izuku hears the knob click, and he moves to turn on the bathroom light. The darkness soothes his headache a little, which he takes as a gift as he sits on the futon cross legged to wait.

--

After three days, a couple of hours feels like nothing at all. Izuku has only had a few sips of water, only sat on the futon and thought, not even slept, when he hears the doorknob click. Izuku sits upright, and just like last time, it’s Fury he sees in the doorway. He’s wearing different clothes, though, just a white long sleeved button down tucked into dark grey slacks with his sunglasses covering his eyes. He opens the door, and Izuku gets to his feet, glancing up at him.

“It’s time,” Fury says, looking at Izuku. In the darkness, Izuku can’t make out the shape of his eyes through the dark glasses. “So you’ve got some interesting night time hobbies, huh kid?”

“That’s one way to put it,” Izuku answers, shrugging. Fury snorts, stepping back and opening the door wider. Izuku blinks when he sees Miura and Manami both standing in the hallway. Miura is dressed the same as before, but Manami has changed into a white button down and a navy blue pleated skirt. Izuku tries not to look at the wounds on her legs as he steps out into the hallway, unsure of who to make eye contact with. Manami makes the decision easy for him, smiling wide and bouncing on her heels.

“Midoriya!” she chirps. “You had a quirk this whole time, huh? A really really cool one, too!” She reaches a hand out towards him, her fingers stretched out as if to touch his face, but Miura slaps her hand away.

“Behave,” she says, giving Manami a glare. Manami sticks her tongue out at Miura, and Fury sighs as he starts towards the elevators.

“She’s already waiting,” he says, casting a glance back at the three of them. “I’m sure she’d be happy to let you have him for a few hours afterward, if he survives,” Fury says, meeting Izuku’s gaze as he says it, the edge of a smile creeping up his lips. “From the looks of it, we’ll have him for as long as we want.” Izuku swallows, but he doesn’t reply as they walk to the elevators, Miura and Manami behind him and Fury in front. It’s a short distance, and the sounds of their footsteps on the floor is slightly masked by Manami humming softly under her breath, a tune Izuku doesn’t recognize. Fury presses the call button for the elevator, and it chimes softly.

The ride up to the first floor is quiet. Izuku isn’t sure why he’d expected them to talk, but the

Gekkeiju surround him in the elevator and simply wait. Izuku finds his gaze catching on the bruises visible on Miura's legs, on her face. Manami and Fury aren't bruised the same way, and he wonders if it's part of her quirk, or if her job is simply more dangerous. He has a feeling it's something other than that.

They step out onto the first floor, Fury once again going first and Manami and Miura taking the rear. Izuku finds his gaze sliding over to the television, catching on the news broadcast that seems to always be playing. This time, he's greeted by a scene that's labelled with *LIVE!* in bright bold letters at the top of the screen. There's fire and rubble, dust in the air and embers that climb to the night sky, and Izuku can see All Might standing in his skeletal form, side by side with Mirio. Mirio has a wide smile on his face, and as Izuku sees him start to speak, he realizes he knows exactly what Mirio is saying.

"I am here," Izuku whispers under his breath, in time with Mirio, and he watches as the feed suddenly cuts to another part of the scene. It shows Aizawa and a few police officers, leading Kacchan, Kirishima, Todoroki, Yaoyorozu, Monoma, Iida, and Kendou to an ambulance. Aizawa is helping Kacchan, who's bleeding from one leg, and Izuku realizes it's the live version of the reporting he'd seen the reset before this. The feed changes back to Mirio and All Might, showing Mirio rush forward with a punch that sparks red and gold, but Izuku's attention is dragged away.

"Oi," Fury says, snapping his fingers. Izuku blinks, turning to look at him. Fury is glaring at him through his glasses, his lips turned down in a scowl. "Are you done, or should I wait," he asks, rolling his eyes.

"S-Sorry," Izuku says, blinking and hurrying to follow the man as he starts down the hallway that Izuku knows leads to the elevators. Fury just huffs out an annoyed sigh, and Izuku bites at his lip.

"I bet you were hoping to see something about yourself, huh?" Fury asks as he presses the button to summon the elevator. It opens almost immediately, and he steps inside.

"Not really," Izuku replies, shrugging. Fury raises an eyebrow at him, and Izuku steps onto the elevator, with the girls following close behind him.

"I guess you're probably used to people forgetting about you," Fury says, shrugging. Izuku pointedly ignores him, instead watching the floor indicator at the top of the elevator tick up as they pass the fifth and sixth floors, finally stopping on the seventh. The door opens to the seventh floor, to the large hallway with the hardwood floor and the numerous paintings and potted plants. There's no natural light filtering in from the window, this time, and the ceiling lights cast a soft, warm, yellow glow over the space. It would feel almost homey, if Izuku hadn't been shot in the head last time he was up here.

"Conference room," Miura says softly from behind Izuku, and he blinks as Fury nods, turns and walks to the third door on the left side of the room instead of the first door, like last time. Izuku follows behind, the bottoms of his too-big sweatpants dragging on the wood as Fury opens the door, pushing it inward.

The room is bigger than the last one, with a long, oval table taking up the majority of the space. Its polished surface is the same color as the flooring, which is mostly covered by a rug identical to the one in the other room. The walls are lined with bookshelves on the left wall, but to the right, multiple large television screens are hung on the wall. Most of them are off, but two near the center are one, one displaying the same news broadcast that had been on downstairs, and the other showing a recording of what looks like Aizawa and Nezu speaking to reporters, dressed formally and looking apologetic. The conference table in the center of the room is surrounded by dark brown leather office chairs, padded and luxurious.

Sasaki is seated at the head of the table, her back to the window that makes up the back wall of the room. She's wearing a crisp, black suit, this time, with a white undershirt and an olive tie that shines gold in the light. Her hands, where they're steeped in front of her face, elbows resting on the table, are adorned with gold rings with chains attaching some of them to one another. Her glowing green eyes are fixed on Izuku, but Izuku is looking at the seat next to her.

Sitting cross legged in a chair that's been pulled away from the table, Mouse is watching the three of them with wide eyes. She's dressed the same as before, and she's clutching a small, wrinkled and sootstained piece of paper in her tiny hands. She stands out like a sore thumb in the room, filthy and small and scared. Izuku meets her eyes and gives her a tiny smile that she doesn't return.

"Izuku Midoriya," Sasaki says, her voice warm with her smile as she tips her head to the side, black hair falling around her horns. "Have a seat. I've heard a lot about you."

"Maiko Sasaki," Izuku replies, looking to her and holding her gaze as he steps forward, taking the seat opposite her at the table. "It's a pleasure," he adds, remembering her reaction to manners last time. She brightens up, eyes widening slightly, so he figures that was the right move.

"Oh, the pleasure's all mine," she says, leaning back in her chair and pulling her hands back, resting them on her lap. "Now, I've been told you have information I could use?"

Izuku nods, swallowing. "I-I do," he says. The pounding in his head is grounding, he thinks, but it also gets worse as his heart rate ticks up. "I know that you're Maiko Sasaki, leader of the Gekkeiju. I know that you're Phosgene, or at least that's what you were known as in America. I know that your quirk," he takes a deep breath, meets her eyes, "is not your horns, your wings, or your eyes. I know that it is called Imposition, and that had this conversation gone differently, you would have asked me to tell you what you were going to say." He clenches his jaw and fixes his gaze to hers. "Isn't that right?"

Sasaki doesn't even blink, just tipping her head to the side slightly and watching him with half lidded eyes and a slight smile. "That's right," she purrs, voice low and rough. "How'd you know?"

"My quirk, Mulligan, lets me see the future if I'm in danger," Izuku says. He tries to fill his voice with confidence, with strength. "I can see potential paths the future can take."

Sasaki hums. "Mm, so I suppose you know that you're in danger, already?" Her lips quirk up, the corners of her eyes crinkling. "That certainly makes this more interesting." She reaches behind her, and Izuku knows even before he sees it that she's pulling out her handgun. She levels the gun at him, pointing it at his head. Izuku doesn't let himself react, instead watching Sasaki with a blank face even as she wraps her hands around the gun.

"We're going to play a game, Midoriya." She taps her fingernails on the side of the gun, the metal making a soft clicking noise as she does. "Mouse is going to ask you some questions, and you'll answer them. Easy enough?"

Izuku blinks, then shrugs. "Sure," he replies, glancing over to Mouse. She's not even looking at the gun; instead, her eyes are glued to the paper in her hands.

"Mouse, dearie, go ahead," Sasaki says, pulling one hand away from the gun and resting that elbow on the table, her cheek cradled in her hand. Her head is tilted as she watches Izuku with a smile that's too wide.

"When have you used your quirk in this facility?" Mouse asks, reading off of the paper. Izuku watches her instead of Sasaki.

“That’s kind of a hard question to answer,” Izuku replies. “I’ve used it a few times, so.” He shrugs, noting the way that Sasaki shifts in her chair slightly.

“Are you the same person as the vigilante known as Ace?” Mouse peeks up from over the paper at him.

“I am,” Izuku replies, watches the red firelight in Mouse’s eyes flash and fade away.

“Do you care about me?” Mouse’s fingers shake as she asks the question, and Izuku can’t help the way he blinks in surprise, his brows furrowing. He glances over at Sasaki, who’s grinning wide, too-sharp teeth showing.

“I do,” he answers, truthfully, and he sees Mouse flinch, then blink, eyes wide and confused. She looks up at him, mouth slightly open, and beside her, Sasaki laughs.

“Perfect!” she says. “Well done, Midoriya,” she says, chuckling lightly and setting the gun down on the table in front of her. “We can talk about the deal you mentioned to Sumire, then. What exactly is it that you want from me?”

Izuku blinks, swallows. “I-I want you to let me go,” he says, meeting her eyes. “And I want to take Mouse and Avenging Angel with me.” Sasaki’s eyes widen, just a fraction, and then she’s smiling, open mouthed, laughing. Her eyes almost shut as she tips her head back, her laughs rising into a loud cackle that fills the room.

“Oh,” she says, leaning forward and wiping tears from her eyes. “Aren’t you precious? I hope you have something good to offer in return.” She leans forward on the table, eyes wide and mouth still smiling. “I mean, you must understand how hard it is to acquire assets like Mouse and Angel. What is it that you’ll give me in return, hmm?” Izuku opens his mouth, then closes it. His head hurts, and his fingers are tingling, and he doesn’t know what to say, not with Sasaki staring at him like that, like he’s an actor on a stage, giving a comedy routine.

“I-I can use my quirk to help you,” he says, licking his chapped lips. “I can give you information.” He hears the quiver in his own voice, and he curses himself for it. *I didn’t think this through well enough*.

Sasaki sighs, shaking her head and rolling her eyes, like she’s fondly exasperated at a friend’s bad joke. It’s a contrast to what she does, reaching down with one hand to pick up the gun from the table, stretching her arm out and pointing it to her left, directly at Mouse. Izuku feels a chill run down his spine, like ice water on his skin, as Mouse gazes up at it, fear burning in her dark eyes.

“It’s such a shame, really,” Sasaki says, puffing out her cheeks and shaking her head. “You would have made such a good villain, you know? I’d imagine that with your legal quirklessness, you have more than enough reason to hate the heroic society.” She looks at the nails on the hand that isn’t holding the gun, picking at them idly. “If I were you, I would have joined us instead. It’d make a much better negotiating point, you know? I already have plenty of information, but having a new pawn is always so nice.” She glances up at him, grinning wide. “I guess you should have looked at a couple more futures, hmm? Maybe then you would have known that I don’t care for heroic types. Trying to save her,” she shakes her gun in Mouse’s direction, “is really just annoying, in my opinion.”

“So,” she says, eyes narrowing. “Mouse is going to ask you a question, and you’re going to lie. If you don’t, I’ll shoot her.” She glances to Mouse, whose eyes have started to tear up, her bottom lip wobbling.

“I don’t wanna kill Izuku,” Mouse snuffles, her fingers crinkling the paper she still clutches. “Mouse is dangerous. Lying to Mouse makes alive people turn dead.”

“Oh, Mouse,” Sasaki says, sighing. “If you don’t, he’s going to die anyway, silly. And then you’ll have to spend a few days with Mr. Kazuo, and you won’t like that very much, will you?” She shakes her head, sighing. “I don’t want to have to punish you.”

“It’s okay, Mouse,” Izuku says, giving the child a smile. He sees Sasaki’s acid green eyes shift over to look at him. “You can ask me. It’s okay.”

Mouse nods, her little head bobbing up and down. “Are you going to hate Mouse? For killing you,” she says, voice quiet. Izuku sees the flash of fire in the bottoms of her irises.

“Remember to lie, Midoriya,” Sasaki says, voice singsong. Her finger is resting on the trigger of the pistol.

“Yes,” Izuku says, and he sees the bright fire fill Mouse’s eyes, turning the coal-dark eyes into bright, glowing embers. He fills the heat in his chest, and he coughs, smoke bubbling out of him. He hopes that this next reset won’t make him too sick to try again.

“I’m sorry,” Mouse says, and Izuku can see tears running down her cheeks, drawing clean lines in the soot there. “I don’t want you to hate me,” she says, crushing the paper in her hands, staring at Izuku. “I don’t want you to hate Mouse, but I don’t want you to die either,” she says, voice heavy with tears.

“S okay,” Izuku says, coughing up a wisp of smoke. “I won’t hate you,” he says, and just like that, the fire in Mouse’s eyes and Izuku’s lungs snuffs out. Izuku blinks, a hand coming up to feel at his chest. He can feel an unnatural heat seeping through his sweatshirt, but it’s fading, and even though his lungs still itch and burn, he can tell that it’s not growing, not any more. Mouse is staring at him, open mouthed, as Sasaki tsks in annoyance.

“Damn,” she says, pointing the gun at Izuku instead. “I should have known you’d figure it out.” She wraps her other hand around the gun, a scowl on her face, her eyes boring into him as her lip curls up, showing her razor-sharp teeth.

“It ends if you tell the truth,” Izuku says, his voice raspy with smoke, “doesn’t it?” His gaze flickers to Mouse, who’s staring at him, mouth open and eyes wide. She blinks at him, but Izuku has to tear his eyes away to watch Sasaki.

“It does,” she says, eyes half lidded. “Like I said before, it’s a real shame you felt the need to be a hero. I could have done so much with someone as smart as you,” she says, and Izuku sees the muscles in her arms tense before he hears the click of the trigger and the bang of the gunshot. He shuts his eyes before the bullet goes through his forehead, and he hopes that he *has* another reset in him.

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Izuku feels the nausea, first, but it’s the burning in his hands and feet that makes him wince when he wakes back up, standing with his hand on Mouse’s head. She flinches at the motion, and Izuku swallows back a mouthful of spit as he pulls his hand away.

“Sorry,” he says to her, and she blinks at him. “I didn’t mean to startle you.” She just stares at him, and he makes himself take a deep breath, resisting the urge to throw up. His stomach is burning like Mouse’s quirk is activated on it, and his head is pounding with a heavy pain, blurring his

vision and sending shocks of pain through his temples and jaw. His fingers and feet tingle strangely, painfully, and as he turns to the door, just in time for it to click, he feels unsteady on his feet.

Miura opens the door, and Izuku watches as a strange expression passes over her face. She glances behind Izuku, at Mouse, then back at him.

“Miura,” he says, just as she’s opening her mouth to speak. “I want to speak with Sasaki, immediately. Tell her that I’ve got an offer she can’t refuse, but that she should hurry if she doesn’t want to lose the chance.” Izuku watches Miura’s brows furrow, her mouth open slightly, before she sighs.

“I have a feeling I’m missing something,” she says, her gaze looking over Izuku. “Mouse, are you okay here?” she asks, not looking away from Izuku.

“Mouse is okay,” Mouse says from behind him. “Sumire can leave Mouse.” Izuku glances back, but he regrets the motion as his vision blurs and warps. He squeezes his eyes shut, stumbling slightly to the side, and he feels a cool hand steady him, resting on his shoulder.

“Midoriya?” Miura asks, and when Izuku opens his eyes, there’s alarm in her voice. “Did you get hit by Mouse’s quirk?”

“No,” Izuku replies, blinking away the black spots from his eyes. “This is from my own quirk,” he says, and her eyes widen slightly before she nods, sharply.

“Okay,” she says, and then she releases his shoulder, steps back. “I can talk to Kazuo and Manami, and she’ll probably be willing to meet with you. If I tell her you’re Ace, it’ll be faster, but she has a lot going on right now.” She opens the door further, holding it open for Izuku, and he steps out into the hallway, his feet buzzing with each step.

“What, with the Kamino incident?” Izuku asks, and he sees Miura freeze, staring at him. “Or has that not happened yet?”

“I really thought you were quirkless,” Miura says, sighing and shaking her head as she shuts and locks the door. “That the Ace part was the ruse.”

Izuku blinks. “I was quirkless, for a while,” he says. “I didn’t know about my quirk until I was fourteen.” Miura looks at him, something unreadable in her gaze.

“You know that Sasaki will likely kill you,” she says, and it isn’t a question. “But you want to meet with her anyway?”

“It’s the only way,” Izuku says. “I know that you would help me, if you could, but it won’t work” He sighs, meeting her eyes. “I’m sorry, Miura. I know you would have tried for me.”

She stares back at him, then sighs a heavy breath. “Of course you know,” she says, so quietly Izuku thinks it’s to herself. “Let’s go to the first floor.” She turns, starts walking, and Izuku blinks, following her. The walk to the elevator is familiar, but there’s something different about it. Izuku can’t ignore the way his feet are numb and tingling, and he walks strangely, not quite a limp but something else. His toes keep dragging against the ground, and he’s slow. Izuku knows Miura can tell, from the way she keeps looking back at him, but she doesn’t say anything about it, and for that, Izuku is grateful. She stops in front of the elevator, pressing the button and waiting.

“You used your quirk in Mouse’s room,” she says, quietly. “Why wait until then?” Izuku glances up at her, but her gaze slides away to the elevator doors as they slide open.

“I have to be in danger,” Izuku answers and Miura nods, a soft breath escaping her.

“And Mouse is dangerous,” she says. It’s not a question, not an insult, but just a statement.

“How old is she?” Izuku asks as they step onto the elevator, because he can’t help but wonder.

“I don’t know,” Miura replies, voice soft. She presses the button for the first floor. “At least five, not more than eight. She’s had her quirk for about three years.” Izuku swallows, nods. *If she got her quirk at the typical age, she’s probably seven or eight*, he thinks to himself. Mouse only looks about five, and it hurts Izuku’s heart to think about it.

“Sasaki bought her?” Izuku asks, and Miura looks at him sharply.

“I shouldn’t be talking to you about this,” she says, and the warning in her voice is clear enough. Izuku nods, the motion worsening the ache in his head. He ignores it, though, and the elevator doors slide open. Miura marches out, and Izuku follows close behind her.

“Yamamoto,” she says, glancing to the receptionist, who glances up at her, then quickly back down. “Where is Manami?”

“Right here!” Manami’s voice replies, from over in the television area where she’d been on that first reset. She pops up from the couch, her red hair loose and wavy. Yamamoto glances over, then back down at her computer, seemingly satisfied. Miura walks over to the couches, glancing back at Izuku, and he follows. Manami stares at them both, a curious expression on her face. The television is playing something different, though, and Izuku realizes it’s still earlier on than that first time. The news is showing a burning forest, a forest lit with blue flame, and it’s reporting that two UA students are missing and ten are injured. Izuku would be nervous if he didn’t know everyone lived. Manami glances up at him, then Miura.

“What are you doing with Midoriya, Sumimi?” she asks, tilting her head to the side slightly. Miura sighs.

“He wants to speak with the boss,” she says. “Midoriya, explain.” Izuku blinks, looking at Manami.

“I need to speak with Sasaki immediately,” he says. “I have an offer to make her, but I’m not willing to wait.” He watches Manami blink.

“Okay!” she says, her face splitting into a grin. “She loves that kind of thing,” she says then reaches down into the couch. Izuku can’t see what she’s grabbing for, and for a brief moment his brain whispers that it’s a gun, but she pulls up a slim cell phone with a pink case, and she taps on the screen for a moment before holding it up to her ear.

“Hi!” she chirps into the phone after a moment. “Your new acquisition wants to make you an offer, and he says it’s time sensitive. Sumimi is here with me now, but I could get Kaz too if you want.” She pauses, and Izuku can hear talking on the other end of the line.

“Oh, yeah, of course,” Manami says, nodding. “I think he’s pretty serious about it. I can get Kaz to get it from Mouse while you’re talking to him?” She waits, then nods. “Okay! We’ll be up in a sec. Love you!” She pulls the phone away from her ear, tapping at it, then hitting a few more buttons. She holds it back to her ears, humming.

“*What.*” Fury’s voice is audible through the receiver, much louder than who Izuku had assumed was Sasaki.

“Hi bro!” Manami says. “Midoriya is gonna talk with mom,” Izuku blinks at that, because there is *no way* Sasaki is old enough to actually be her mother, “but she wants to know what he said to Mouse’s questions, so she wants you to get his answers and bring them up as soon as you’re done.”

“*What? How on earth did he--*” Fury starts, and Manami interrupts him with a giggle.

“He’s gonna make her an offer! I dunno what, but it should be fun. See you in a bit!” She pulls the phone away from her ear, tapping on the screen, then she straightens up, looking at Izuku and Miura.

“Are we good?” Miura asks, seemingly unfazed. She glances briefly at Izuku.

“Yep!” Manami replies, a smile on her face. “I’m kind of excited, you know? It’ll be really fun to watch you negotiate with her,” she says, looking at Izuku, then squinting and turning her head slightly to the side. “Do you have a fever? You’re kind of red...” she reaches out a hand, like she’s going to touch his forehead, but Miura bats her hand away.

“It’ll be interesting, that’s for sure,” Miura replies. “Let’s go. We don’t want to keep her waiting.” She turns, walking toward the elevators, and Izuku blinks before trailing after her. Manami catches up to him quickly, walking beside him with her hands in the pockets of her sweatpants.

“Hey, Midoriya,” she says, leaning toward him. “What kind of deal are you planning to make?” Izuku stares back at her.

“A risky one,” he replies, turning his head to look at the elevators. As the doors slide open and Miura walks inside, Izuku follows. His head aches and throbs, and from the pain in his stomach and hands and head, Izuku knows this is his last chance.

I won’t mess this up, he tells himself. *I know what I have to do. This is my only choice.*

Chapter End Notes

cw: abuse, nausea/vomiting

[discord!](#)

I HOPE YOU ALL ENJOYED!!!! next chap should be the last one of this arc!! i wonder if y'all can guess what izuku is about to do :3c

captivity, part 5

Chapter Summary

last time: izuku gets killed by sasaki a couple more times, and now he's out of resets!

Chapter Notes

HI GAMERS :D

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

The elevator ride to the seventh floor is quiet, except for Manami's humming. She's bopping her head along to whatever song it is, but Miura doesn't even seem to notice, staring at the elevator doors as they slowly climb to the top of the building. Izuku wants to lean against the wall of the elevator, but he can't, not with the two of them here. As much as he thinks Miura is on his side, he also knows Manami won't hesitate to kill him, given the chance. Izuku doesn't want to look weak, not in this situation.

The elevator doors open both too soon and not soon enough. Manami steps off first, into the hallway he's seen twice before. Izuku follows, slowly, his feet dragging on the floor. He bites at his lower lip and tries to ignore the stinging in his toes, just like he's ignoring the way his stomach feels heavy and painful in his gut. He can see that the door they'd gone into the first time, to the room with the couch and the ottoman, is open, and Manami seems to take that as a sign, headed directly for that room. Izuku wishes, briefly, that he'd had more time.

He follows Manami into the room, and it's much the same as the first time. There's the warm brown leather couch, the matching ottoman, and the coffee table. The long, floor to ceiling window on the back wall and the bookshelves on the others. This time, though, there's a mug of steaming liquid on the coffee table, and Sasaki is dressed differently, in a loose, flowy black tank top and a pair of athletic shorts that highlight the thick curves of muscle in her legs. She's not wearing any jewelry, either, but she looks just as relaxed and calm as each of the past two times Izuku's met her. She's sitting with her legs crossed, leaning back idly.

"Maiko Sasaki," Izuku says as he walks into the room, and he bows, bending at the waist and staring at the floor. "It's a pleasure to meet you." He holds the position for as long as he can bear the way it makes blood pool in his temples, the way it makes his vision go fuzzy and strange, then he straightens up. Sasaki's eyes are crinkled in delight, her smile wide and showing teeth.

"My, my," she says, leaning forward. "I like you already, Izuku Midoriya. Have a seat," she says, gesturing to the ottoman. Izuku walks around it to sit, trying his best to hide the shaking in his hands and the strange numbness in his feet. Unlike the first time, though, Manami sits down next to him, pulling out her phone. Izuku is pretty sure he sees Candy Crush on her screen, but he tugs his gaze away from Manami and back to Sasaki.

"Now, I've been told you have an offer to make me," Sasaki says, tipping her head back slightly. "I'll be up front with you when I say that I'm rather fond of striking deals, but I'm also fairly hard

to please. So I certainly hope this is worth my time.” She’s looking down at him, with her strange, goat-like eyes glowing in the light of the room. Izuku meets her gaze easily and prays that he’s judged her correctly.

“I have a quirk that lets me see possible futures,” Izuku says. “That’s how I know your name, your identity as Phosgene, and your quirk, Imposition.” He watches her eyes narrow, slightly, her shoulders raise in a small shrug.

“Mm,” she hums, “couldn’t you also just be talented at sneaking around, at gathering information?” She tips her head to the side, grins lazy and slow. “What do you call your little quirk?”

“Mulligan,” Izuku replies. “I would tell you the activation requirements, but then you’d take that gun you’ve got behind you and point it at my head, so I’d rather not.” He relishes the way Sasaki’s eyebrows jump up in surprise as she leans forward, blinking at him with wide eyes.

“Oh, so you really can see the future, hmm?” She tips her head to the side. “So, what’s this offer you’re making me?” She shifts her hands, resting them on top of her crossed legs, her fingers intertwining. She watches Izuku with half lidded eyes and a small smirk, and Izuku takes a deep breath before speaking.

“Have you heard of the vigilante known as Ace, Phosgene?” He meets her gaze, keeps his face carefully blank. *Everything relies on this. I can’t afford another reset.*

“I have,” she replies, tone even. “Why?”

“I am Ace,” Izuku says. “And until now, I’ve kept my identity as Ace separate from Izuku Midoriya.” He inhales, soft and gentle. “I’m legally quirkless, as I’m sure you’re aware.”

Sasaki nods. “I am. In fact, I’d planned to dispose of you because of it,” she says, grinning. “The quirkless aren’t of much use to me.” Izuku ignores the barb, ignores the attempt to get to him. It’s not hard, given that his head is full enough with just trying to remember what Sasaki had said to him in earlier resets.

“But someone who isn’t quirkless, yet is known as quirkless, would be,” Izuku says, and Sasaki blinks at him, slow and controlled. “I have plenty of reason to despise this heroic society,” he says, mirroring Sasaki’s earlier words, and her lips quirk up, ever so slightly as he continues speaking. “I think I’d make a rather useful tool.”

“What are you offering, Midoriya?” Sasaki asks, her tongue running over the bottom edge of her top teeth as she grins, wide and predatory. Izuku swallows.

“I want to join the Gekkeiju,” he says, staring at her and fixing his face with a determined look. “I will become one of your *assets* .”

Sasaki raises an eyebrow, tilting her head and grinning. “Oh? And what do I get out of the deal?” Izuku mirrors her expression, raising an eyebrow and smiling. The expression feels wrong on his face, but it’s what he needs to do.

“That *is* your part of the deal,” Izuku says. “In as many futures as I’ve seen, you haven’t told me the goals of your organization, but I know one thing. Seeing the future and getting inside information from UA will get you closer to *any* goal. I’m far more valuable to you as a willing participant than I am as a prisoner or dead.” He watches as Sasaki’s eyes narrow even further, her smile dropping for just a second as she leans further forward, and he knows, even before she

speaks, that he's won.

"And what would you ask for in return?" she asks. "Is it enough for you to simply survive?" Izuku takes a slow breath, smiles.

"I want protection, and I want resources," he says. "I'm a high school student, after all. I can't purchase firearms, and if I'm caught as a spy, I'm sure you can imagine it wouldn't be great for me." Izuku swallows. "That's the other thing. I'd like to pose as a double agent, of sorts. I already have a connection to Eraserhead as both Ace and as Izuku, and his quirk..." he sighs, biting at his lip. It's not entirely acting. "It's not a good match-up, for me."

Sasaki snorts, softly. "Is it a good match for anyone other than mutation types?" she asks, then chuckles, light through her mouth. "You know, this isn't what I'd expected from you, not at all. I wonder how many futures you saw where I killed you."

Izuku opens his mouth to reply but he stops when he hears the sound of a door opening, behind him. He turns, glancing back at the door. Manami doesn't even move beside him, but he sees Fury, sunglasses and button-down like before, standing in the doorway, looking annoyed.

"Oh, Kazuo," Sasaki says. "I presume you spoke with Mouse about Midoriya, here?" Fury nods, sharply.

"Yeah," he says. "Kid's got a future sight quirk, and he's used it here." He glances down at Izuku, the gold of his eye shining even through the glasses. "Anything else you need to know?"

"Mm," Sasaki hums, and Izuku glances back to see her resting her chin in her hand thoughtfully, her thumb resting on the bottom of her lip. "I wonder whose team he'd do best on?"

"He's *joining* ?!" Fury asks, voice loud and incredulous. "What the *fuck* ."

"Manners, Kazuo," Sasaki says, idly, like it's a reflex. "I think he'd do best on your team, hmm, Sumire? His quirk is best suited to information gathering, anyway." Izuku blinks, glancing over his other shoulder to Miura where she's leaned against the wall beside the door, watching.

"It's fine with me," she says. "I know both of his identities already, so it'd be easy to deliver orders." Izuku swallows back a sigh of relief. *Of all of these three, I'm glad that it's her.*

"Perfect!" Sasaki says, clapping her hands together and smiling gleefully as Izuku turns to look back at her. "Well," she relaxes her grin slightly. "There is one condition, of course."

Izuku swallows. "What is it?" he asks, voice small. Sasaki gives him an almost fond look.

"You'll be staying here, at least until everything with the League of Villains is fully resolved," she says. "You surely know what will happen, but I don't want any spoilers, okay? And I definitely wouldn't want you to jeopardize your new position in my family so early on by doing something stupid like trying to save your little friend."

Izuku blinks. "O-Okay," he replies, cursing his stutter. *I should have expected this* , he thinks to himself. Sasaki smiles, her expression soft.

"Of course, you'll have a place to stay here, and we'll get you fitted for a suit soon enough," she says, flipping her hair over her shoulder and leaning forward, eyes gleaming in excitement. "But you have to go through initiation first, *Ace* ." She says his other name like it's something new, something special. It sends a chill down Izuku's spine, and he swallows back his nerves.

“Initiation?” he asks, and he hears Sasaki giggle and Miura sigh, at the same time.

“Of course,” Sasaki says, her eyes flickering up to above and behind Izuku. “Kazuo, would you do the honors?” Her gaze looks back down at Izuku. “You’re probably aware of his quirk already, hmm? Don’t resist!” She laughs, her eyes half lidded and hungry. Izuku swallows.

“Fuck, fine,” Fury says, voice full of annoyance. “Turn around and look at me, brat,” he orders, and Izuku braces himself for a wave of that awful pain as he turns to look at Fury. Fury’s glasses are still, on, but he pulls them off, shaking his head, and then he looks at Izuku, golden eye bright beside the scarred, milky one.

Izuku is braced for pain, and maybe that’s why the sensation catches him so off guard. He feels warm, soft and clean and safe, first, and then it all hits him at once, like a weight has been dropped onto his chest. He feels like after a good workout, when his muscles are worn out and his head is buzzing pleasantly, when he’s just taken a hot shower and he’s calm and relaxed, after a good meal, full and happy. He can’t think, can’t move or breathe from the force of it, and as Fury stares at him, it’s not that Izuku *can’t* look away. He could, if he wanted to, he’s sure, but the thing is, he doesn’t want it to end. Not when he feels like he’s floating, drifting, every nerve and muscle and bone feeling better than he’s ever felt.

When Fury turns away, slides his glasses back on, Izuku almost *whimpers*, almost begs him not to stop. He feels the sensation slide away, too quickly, and suddenly he’s all too aware of just how *rotten* he feels. His stomach is like a bowling ball under his ribs, and his lungs hurt, too, in a way he hadn’t even noticed before. His headache is worse, now, and there are fuzzies crawling around the edges of his vision. Izuku blinks, trying to calm his vision, but his heart is beating far too fast in his chest and he feels hot and flushed and strange. *Feverish*, he notes dully, and he wonders how he was working through this, before.

“See, that wasn’t so bad,” Sasaki coos, and Izuku turns to look at her, blinking. “You’ll get more of that, if you’re good,” she says, and Izuku frowns.

“I-I--” he cuts himself off, blinking. *I can’t speak*. The words won’t form, even as he opens his mouth to talk, and Sasaki giggles.

“That’s a common side effect the first time, don’t worry,” she says, and if anything, that makes Izuku want to worry *more*. He feels strange, though, echoes of Fury’s quirk popping and shooting through his nerves, making his muscles jerk strangely. Izuku blinks, swallowing, as his vision starts to dull and warp.

“He’s going to pass out,” Manami says from beside him, cheerful. Izuku wants to disagree, wants to say that he won’t, but he feels himself start to list to the side. He feels hands grip his shoulder through the shirt he’s wearing, and then he’s out.

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Izuku comes to slowly, like pulling himself out of a thick syrup. He doesn’t open his eyes, not right away, but he starts to drift less and feel more. His stomach aches, and his head feels like it’s stuffed full of cotton, but there’s a cool, damp cloth on his forehead, and he’s tucked into a soft bed, with a thick blanket draped over him. He hears someone breathing near him, and he slowly opens his eyes to a dimly lit room. He can see a white ceiling above him and the edges of a dark navy-blue wall, and as he tilts his head slightly, he sees Miura, sitting in a chair beside his bed and flipping through a book. Her hair is wet, and she’s wearing a flowery blouse and a pair of jeans--an outfit Izuku has seen her wear at the hardware store, before. She glances over to him, shutting her book as she seems to notice he’s awake.

“How are you feeling?” Miura asks, setting her book down on her lap. Izuku blinks, swallowing.

“Okay,” he says, his voice raspy and dry. “How long was I...?”

Miura reaches to a table by the bed, grabbing a glass of water with a pink bendy straw sticking out of it. She holds it up to his mouth, and Izuku gratefully sips at the water, sucking it into his mouth and relishing the cool feeling as it slips down his throat. The room he’s in is nothing like the basement rooms--it’s *nice*, with navy walls and white trim, and he’s in a full sized bed, not just a futon on the floor. He can see hardwood floors and three doors attached to the room, along with an empty desk against one wall of the room, facing a window with white curtains.

“A few days,” Miura says as she pulls the water away, setting it on the table beside him. “You’ve been in and out, but this is the first time you’ve been coherent enough to answer me when I asked how you were feeling.” She watches him, something unreadable in her dark gaze as Izuku processes that.

“A few days?” he asks, starting to pull himself into a sitting position. Miura reacts, lightning fast, standing up from her chair and pushing him back into bed, her book tumbling to the ground.

“Don’t,” she says, warningly, then sighs. “You kept trying to get up, when you were running a fever. I don’t think it’s a good idea,” she says, pulling her hands from his shoulders.

“What happened, after Fury used his quirk on me?” Izuku asks. Dread has started to build in his chest, low and hot. *What if this ruins the deal? What if Sasaki thinks I’m too weak, now? What if she just kills me?*

“You passed out, which is a pretty normal reaction,” Miura says, leaning down and picking her book up off the ground, dusting off the dark green cover. “And then you didn’t wake up even after about ten hours of sleep, which is not. You were running a fever, so we called in one of our doctors, and they said you probably needed to go to a hospital.” Her gaze slides over to him, and she sighs again, setting the book down on the table beside the bed and sitting in the chair. “Which obviously isn’t an option considering that you’re still viewed as missing. The doctor gave you some fluids and watched over you until your fever broke, and then I’ve been taking turns with Manami to watch you.”

Izuku swallows. “Sasaki, is she...” He takes a breath. “Am I in danger, because of this?” he raises one arm, gesturing at his body, and even that slight movement sends tingling through his fingers, like they’re asleep. Miura blinks, then sighs, shaking her head.

“No, if anything, it makes her want you more,” she replies. “Once she obtains an... asset, she will go to great lengths to keep it.” She grimaces. “She also likes to collect experiences, for her quirk. Given the chance, I’m sure she’d want to experience your sickness for herself.” Izuku blinks, then nods, glancing down at himself. His arms are resting on top of the blanket, and they look normal save for a bruise on the back of his hand, likely where they’d given him fluids. He’s still wearing long sleeves.

Miura sighs, and Izuku looks up at her, at the healing bruises on her face. “You know that was a bad decision,” she says, softly, “right?”

“It was the only one I could have made,” Izuku replies, and Miura nods, not looking surprised.

“I would have... I would have helped you escape,” she says. “I don’t think I can, now. The boss, she’s too invested.” Miura picks at the sleeves of her blouse, her pale fingers tangling in the fabric. “I don’t know if that’s a good thing or a terrible one.”

“We got caught,” Izuku replies, and Miura looks up at him sharply. “In the future where you help me. We got caught, and Manami killed me.” Miura stares back at him.

“You didn’t need saving at all, did you?” she asks, quietly. “You’ve known so much, since you first got here.” Izuku has to hold back a chuckle at that. *I wish*, he finds himself thinking.

“I’m glad you would help me,” he says, glancing down at the blanket on top of him. “Even if it wouldn’t have helped. I’m glad.” He smiles at her, even though he’s too tired to grin too wide. Miura sighs, blowing air through her mouth and nose and glancing to the side, but Izuku can see the faintest hint of a blush creep up her cheeks.

“You need to be careful,” she says. “Don’t do anything stupid. The boss, she’d still kill you if you caused more trouble than you’re worth. She sighs, again, and Izuku watches as she relaxes, slightly. “You should rest more, for now. It’s late. Tomorrow, I’ll show you what you need to know.”

Izuku nods, and he doesn’t protest her suggestion to rest, because even being awake for this short of time is making his head ache again. It’s easy to fall back asleep, even with all of the thoughts bouncing around in his brain. It doesn’t feel real, that he’s made it to this point. That he’s *alive*, that he’s going to stay that way, at least for now. Izuku needs to rest and get better, and then he can start working on his next step. *I’m going to save Mouse and Avenging Angel*, he thinks, *and I’m going to make it look like an accident. I’m going to tear the Gekkeiju down from the inside, and I have the perfect quirk to do it.*

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The next morning, Izuku wakes up alone. The curtains over the window in the corner leak light into the room, spreading soft fingers of cool sunlight across the floor. Izuku sits up slowly, and he’s grateful that he only feels the faintest hint of dizziness.

He gets out of bed and explores the room, opening the doors and looking inside. There’s a small closet that’s empty except for a few wire hangers and a dust bunny, a bathroom with clean white and blue tiled floor, a shower, a toilet, and a sink. There’s toilet paper, soap, and towels already there, and Izuku thinks he could probably use a shower. Under the long sleeved shirt and basketball shorts he’s wearing (who changed his clothes?), he can feel dried sweat sticking to his skin in a thin layer of grime.

The last door surprisingly isn’t locked, and when Izuku pushes it open, it leads to a hallway with white walls and hardwood floor that matches the one in the room he’d slept in. There are a number of doors lining the hallway, labeled with names. Izuku’s isn’t labelled, but the one beside him is, and it says *Mr. Clean* in both English and Katakana. Izuku stares at it. *Is this like villain apartments? Do villains get apartments?*

Izuku sees Miura up ahead as she turns the corner, looking at him and blinking in surprise. She’s wearing the suit she usually wears as Leadfoot, minus the platform shoes and the metal bands and mask. Instead, she’s wearing a pair of black socks on her feet.

“Midoriya,” she says, “You’re awake.” She walks toward him quickly, looking somewhat surprised, and she stops about three feet back, looking him up and down.

“I feel much better,” he says, and it’s true. He wouldn’t want to work out or fight right now, but his stomach only hurts the smallest bit and his headache is mild enough to ignore. His fingers and feet aren’t tingling anymore, either, although they do feel a bit sore.

“That’s good to hear,” Miura says, then brings a hand to her chin, tipping her head to the side slightly. “I think we’d better get you cleaned up, then we can get you a uniform and some weapons. The boss is strict about how you dress when you’re representing the organization.”

“Is that why you all wear suits?” Izuku asks, tipping his head to the side, and Miura nods.

“It is. Another thing. Don’t refer to her by name unless you’re speaking directly to her,” Miura flicks her ponytail over her shoulder, onto her back. “It helps keep our operations discreet.” Izuku nods. He’d noticed that they never called Sasaki by name, but he hadn’t thought to ask about it.

“Okay,” Izuku replies, stepping back as Miura moves to walk into his room. He steps out of the doorway, back into the room, as she steps inside and flicks the light switch on. Izuku blinks in the bright light, watching as Miura crosses the room to the bathroom and kneels down, opening the cabinet under the sink.

“There’s soap for the shower in here,” she says, glancing over to him as she straightens up. “You go ahead and get clean, and I’ll leave some clothes outside the bathroom door.”

“Whose clothes have I been wearing?” he asks, and Miura smiles slightly.

“Manami’s and Clean’s,” Miura replies. “They’re the closest to you in size.” Izuku nods as Miura walks out of the bathroom into the bigger part of the room.

“Is this where I’ll stay?” Izuku asks, glancing around. Miura nods.

“It’s useful for permanent members to have a bed to sleep in here,” she says. “You might be asked to spend some of your time here, even after you’re allowed to go back to school.” She glances around the room. “Go, get clean. I’ll be back.”

Izuku nods, waiting and watching as she leaves the room before he heads into the bathroom. He’s relieved to see that the door locks, even though there’s no doubt in his mind that any of the Gekkeiju could easily get inside, even if he locked himself in. He locks the doorknob anyway, before he turns on the shower and lets the tiny bathroom fill with steam. He watches his reflection in the small mirror above the white-tiled sink, watches as his form blurs and fades with the fog creeping across the mirror’s surface.

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Izuku feels uncomfortable after having his measurements taken, but Miura had been quick and clinical about it, moving easily and scrawling the number down on a form. Izuku had asked, jokingly, if she took the measurements of all the new recruits, and Miura had given him what was probably the world’s least impressed look. Now, she’s looking through drawers of brightly colored fabric, sorting through squares of silky material and holding them up to Izuku’s face, to his hair. Izuku is standing in the center of the room, staring at the brightly colored fabrics, at the suits hanging from hangers and the sewing machines on tables, the needles and thread stuck in tomato-shaped pin cushions.

“How’s this?” Miura asks, holding up a set of three fabrics, one a deep, dark crimson red, one a pitch black, and the third a thick, woven grey with a tint to it that’s nearly blue. “You’d look nice with a waistcoat.”

“Uh,” Izuku says. “I-I don’t really know anything about fashion,” he says, and Miura’s lips quirk up at the edge.

“I didn’t either, when I was your age,” she says, setting the three swatches of fabric on top of the

cabinet she'd been looking through, right beside the paper with his measurements.

"Who makes all of the suits?" Izuku asks, and Miura glances back up at him, smiling.

"I do," Miura says, and Izuku sees a flash of something light her eyes in a way he's only ever seen in the Miura he talked to at the hardware store. "If I use lead scissors and lead needles, I can use my quirk," she says, waving a hand. As she does, a pair of scissors rises from a table some ways away, glowing a faint violet. Izuku blinks.

"That's so smart," he says, feeling himself smile in excitement, his eyes growing wide. "With lead tools, you could be good at basically anything, right? Does it take practice to move the lead, or does it just do whatever you want it to right off the bat? You can't bend it, right? Otherwise you could just make anything made of lead into scissors for when you needed them, so you wouldn't have them."

Miura smiles, sighing softly. "I can't bend things, no. And I used to have to practice, but I've been using my quirk regularly for so long that it's easier than even using my hands, most of the time." Her eyes soften into something fond. "It's nice, to have all of these resources."

Izuku nods. "Is that why you joined the Gekkeiju?" he asks, and Miura blinks, almost flinching back. Izuku feels the smile drop off his face, and he knows he said something wrong, but before he can apologize, Miura shakes her head.

"Manami, Kazuo, and I... the lieutenants, as some of the members call us, are part of the group that founded the Gekkeiju," she says, staring to the side, like she's seeing something distant. "We didn't join, so to speak."

"Oh," Izuku replies. Miura shrugs, sighing under her breath.

"Let's get you some weapons, Ace," she says, turning and walking to a door that's to Izuku's left.

"Ace?" he asks, and she nods.

"It's best to get in the habit of going by your villain name here," she says as she pushes the door to the next room open. "That way, nobody will accidentally call you Midoriya in the field and give you away."

Izuku nods as he follows her into the next room, a brightly lit place that smells of iron and oil. It's a small room, and the layout reminds him of the hardware store, with metal shelving lining the walls and stacks of boxes. It's familiar, when Miura leads him down an aisle, stopping to fish around in a box.

"These are pretty much the same as what you were using before," she says, dropping four sheathed knives on the ground. "And I found a push knife for you." She turns, passing him the knife. It's similar to the one he's used as Ace before, but as he turns it over in his hand, he sees that the blade is shaped like the spades suit in cards, and while the blade itself is shiny silver, the handle is a deep crimson red. It fits perfectly in his hand.

"Wow," he says. "This is perfect." He looks up to see Miura smiling, and he could almost believe he was back in that shop in Musutafu, just another kid shopping at just another store. Miura gets this bright, excited look on her face, and she takes her hand from the box.

"I'll get you some throwing knives soon," she says. "All of my nice ones are at the store right now. I have something even better for you, though," she says, casting a happy grin over her shoulder as she leads him deeper into the room, where the shelves cast shadows on the dark floor and walls.

Miura reaches onto a shelf, the angle of the boxes on it blocking Izuku's view, but when she pulls her hand back, holding a smooth, shiny handgun, Izuku feels his eyes widen slightly. She holds it out to him, but Izuku doesn't reach for it, not yet. She tips her head to the side ever so slightly.

"It's more for later, really," she says, "but it's for after you've had some gun training. In this line of work, you really need to have a gun. Here, take it. It's not loaded," she says, pulling the magazine from the gun and holding it. Izuku is pretty sure this is supposed to prove to him that it's unloaded, but he doesn't really know enough about guns for it to be reassuring in the slightest. Miura does a series of quick movements with it, the parts shifting and clicking easily, and then she hands it to him. He takes it, and it's surprisingly heavy in his hands.

"D-Do you even need to use guns?" he asks, turning it over in his palms, feeling the cool, slick metal.

"I don't," Miura replies. "I can use pieces of lead and move them at fast enough speeds that it's the same. I can also stop bullets, or at least the lead part of them," she says. "But guns have their uses. And since I'm essentially bulletproof, I'm the one who teaches newbies how to shoot." She smiles, holding a hand out, and Izuku hands the gun back to her, strangely glad to not have it any more but at the same time reluctant to give it up. He knows just how powerful his quirk will be once he's armed with the gun, but at the same time, he's scared of the damage the weapon could do to other people.

"Do you know when I'm going to be allowed to leave?" Izuku asks as Miura places the gun back on the shelf before turning to look at him. "I-If I'm here much longer, the people looking for me might find this place."

Miura blinks. "They won't," she says. "But the boss said you could probably go tomorrow or the next day. I'm not sure exactly when, but all of the stuff with the League, well, it's over."

Izuku blinks. "It is?" he says, and then he remembers the television broadcast, remembers that he'd slept for a few days this time. "Oh, right. It's been... three days?"

Miura raises an eyebrow. "It's been six days since you arrived here, Ace," she says, sighing softly through her nose. "You don't have the best sense of time, do you?"

"No," Izuku replies faintly, "I don't."

Chapter End Notes

cw: guns, medical stuff mentioned

[discord!](#)

i hope you all enjoyed!!!! the first superarc is pretty much over--we have some intermission/joining type stuff that still has to happen (like izuku leaving the gekkeiju base lol) but :3c im very excited dkfghdfjk

thank you as always for the support!!!! for those of you who have been missing the canon characters, they should be back Soon

intermission, part 1

Chapter Summary

last time: izuku strikes a deal with sasaki and joins the gekkeiju as ace

Chapter Notes

HI GAMERS welcome to the funky little space between superarc 1 and superarc 2 it's not just random filler/intermission but i didn't know what else to call da arc

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Sitting in the back seat of a car in his tattered clothing from the summer training camp, arm guards and knives and razor teeth and everything, is a surreal experience. The city that whips by the window is a blur, and the dark tint to the glass makes Izuku wonder if anyone can even see him at all. It's early evening, and Izuku can hear the sounds of crickets and cicadas, the whistle of the warm summer wind, even over the quiet purr of the car's engine. Izuku stares out the window, trying to focus on the sights and sounds of the outside.

"Hey, kid," Mr. Clean says from the driver's seat of the car. "Do you have the money?" he asks, and Izuku looks up just in time to meet his gaze in the rearview mirror.

Izuku nods, his hand slipping into the pocket of his filthy, bloody cargo shorts and touching the handful of ten yen coins resting there. "I do," he says, quietly. Clean hums, turning his gaze back to the road.

"You know the drill?" he asks, and Izuku nods again.

"Leadfoot told me," Izuku replies, and Clean nods.

"Good, good," he says, tapping his hands against the steering wheel. "We're almost here." He glances back. "Hey, what'd you do to get in under Leadfoot directly? It took me like three years to get in this position."

Izuku shrugs, turning to look back out the window. "It was kind of a special situation," he replies. He hears the turn signal click on, and the car turns a corner, pulling over next to the curb. They've stopped next to a little park with a playground, all brightly colored plastic, and just past the curb, a green payphone stands, waiting.

"Here we go," Clean says. "Wait until I've been gone for a few minutes to call, 'kay?"

Izuku nods, opening the car door and slipping out. "I know. Thanks for the ride," he replies, shutting the door behind him before Clean can answer. Izuku steps out onto the sidewalk, hearing the car leave behind him, feeling the rush of displaced air brush his back as it does.

It's damp and humid outside, like it'd rained since he left, and it makes it so that the leaves of the

trees are oversaturated, intensely green. The bark of the trees is dark, wet, and it makes the neon-brights of the playground and the payphone stand out. Izuku takes a few steps forward, hating the way the dried blood on his shirt cracks and breaks with the movement. He smells like salt and sweat and iron, like something that's begun to rot, and he hates it.

Izuku stops in front of the payphone, stares at the bright green paint coating it. It's shiny, but near the bottom of the box that takes money and gives Izuku a place to dial in a number, it's cracked and chipping, dark orange rust leaking through. There's a thin layer of condensation over the whole thing, and where the water runs and drips through the cracks, it's stained dark and warm, like blood. Izuku watches the water drip onto the damp sidewalk, into a patch of orange-brown already on the concrete below. He can't smell anything over the stench of his own clothing, but he pretends he's just smelling the rusty water and not the blood of the man he'd killed.

Izuku presses a button on the payphone, and a little screen lights up, scrolling with *please pay now!* in Japanese and then English and Mandarin. Izuku stares at the buttons, the discolored plastic buttons. They were probably once white, but now they're more of a cream color, and as Izuku slides three 10 yen coins into the coin slot, he finds himself seeing that cream colored room. He shakes the vision away, and he begins to type the number into the keypad.

He'd seen it on the television while he waited for Sasaki to release him, scrolling across the news over and over again. *If you have any leads to the whereabouts of Izuku Midoriya, please call this number.* Izuku had repeated it to himself so many times that he thinks he knows it better than his own number, at this point. He'd watched broadcasts where it had been on the screen, under a reporter's face, broadcasts where it'd been read aloud by a police officer, broadcasts where Aizawa had looked at the screen and described Izuku, shown pictures of him, broadcasts where his mom had looked into a camera and pleaded for Izuku's captors to release him. Watching them had made Izuku feel sick, but they'd also patched something up in his heart, some hole he hadn't realized had been carved there when Fury had told him *nobody's looking for you*, told him that he didn't matter. Izuku hates himself for believing him.

Izuku presses the final button, lifts the phone and holds it to his ear. It only rings once--a soft, electronic buzzing, and then he hears a familiar voice say,

"Hello, this is the hotline for tips regarding Izuku Midoriya." Izuku recognizes Aizawa's voice immediately, and when he hears his teacher say his name in that tone of voice, that exhausted, almost desperate tone of voice, something in Izuku breaks. He's standing at the phone, expression blank and mind empty one moment, and the next, he's pressing the palm of his hand into his cheek and sobbing, gasping and trying to catch his breath as hot tears roll over his cheeks.

"S-Sensei," he whispers, voice broken and heavy, and he hears a sharp intake of breath on the other end of the line, along with a clattering like someone's stood up suddenly.

"Midoriya?!" Aizawa asks, voice tinted with disbelief and hope. "Midoriya, is that you? Where are you?"

"I-It's me," Izuku gasps out. "I-I'm at the park at Nakamura Street." He hiccups, his voice heavy with tears. "Sensei, I-I'm--I'm so sorry," he whispers into the receiver, his voice cracking.

"Don't apologize," Aizawa says, voice sharp. "The park on Nakamura and Fifth," Aizawa says, his voice distant like he'd turned away from the receiver. "Midoriya," he says, this time close and clear again. "Help is on the way. I'm on my way. Are you injured?" There's rustling in the background, like Aizawa is really running to get Izuku, just like that. Izuku goes to bite at his lip, stopping when he remembers the blades in his mouth.

“I-I--” he starts, trying to say he’s *fine* , that he doesn’t even know why he’s crying, but he can’t get the words out. He slides to the ground, sitting with his back pressed to the pole that holds up the payphone, his knees drawn up to his chest, and he clutches the phone to his face like he’s drowning and it’s the only thing keeping him above water. He can hear himself crying, whimpering pathetically, and he hates it, but no matter how hard he tries, he can’t calm his breathing, can’t get himself to calm down.

“Shh,” Aizawa shushes, gently. “You’re okay, Midoriya. Help is on the way. You’re okay.” His voice is calm, soothing, but Izuku can hear the undertone of panic, of *urgency* in his voice. Izuku clings to it, thinks about that, that *help is on the way* , and it makes him sob harder, even as it loosens something coiled tight in his chest.

Izuku hears a beeping from the phone, signalling he’s almost out of time, and he grips the phone tightly. He has more money, has more coins, but he doesn’t think he has it in him to peel himself off of the ground, to uncurl himself and slide more money into the slot. The hand that Izuku doesn’t have holding the phone is shaking violently, and Izuku can’t even steady it enough to run a hand through his hair.

“P-Payphone,” he gasps out. “Out of time.” He swallows around the words, shuts his eyes and tips his head back to rest his skull against the cool metal of the pole he’s leaned against.

“I’m almost there,” Aizawa says, voice quick and firm. “If you run out of time, that’s okay. Just stay right where you are, okay? I’m almost there.” Izuku hums, quietly, his throat wet and full.

“Mhmm.” He tightens his grip on the phone, feeling the plastic shift with the force, but he doesn’t tighten his grip. He’s so, so glad that they’d taken the extra time to drop him off in Musutafu, so close to UA. He’d thought before that he’d be fine, that the few extra minutes from calling and having help arrive wouldn’t matter, but it’s like he’s lost the ability to hold himself together. *It’s stupid* , he thinks, *I was fine when I was actually in danger, but I freak out now?*

He hears the line click off, and Izuku lets go of the phone, letting it swing beside him. He wraps his hands around each other, squeezing one with the other, and it aches between his bones as he presses them together, but it’s something, and it’s grounding. A drop of rust-tinted water drips from the payphone box above him, landing on his forehead and running down to where it catches in his eyebrow, and Izuku flinches, blinking and shaking. He swallows, trying to get rid of some of the wet ache in his throat, but the motion turns into a shaky sob, and Izuku just buries his face in his knees and tries to breathe.

Izuku hears footsteps, quick and rapid on the concrete, and he looks up to see Aizawa, clad in his hero costume complete with the capture scarf that flutters as he runs, sprinting toward Izuku with a determined set to his face. His eyes widen as he catches sight of Izuku, and Izuku realizes how much of a mess he must look, crying his eyes out in the same bloody clothing from the camp, the healing bruise on the side of his face from where Miura had knocked him out when he and Kacchan were initially separated. Aizawa runs toward him, and the second he’s standing there, just in front of Izuku and out of breath, eyes wide and wild, Izuku is crying anew, fresh tears pouring down his face.

“Midoriya, fuck, kid,” Aizawa says, frantically, crouching down, his eyes moving over Izuku quickly. “Are you injured?” he asks, his hands reaching to grab at Izuku’s head and pat his skull, like he’s checking for bumps. Izuku shakes his head, biting at his lip, wincing with his razor teeth make a small cut in the skin there. Aizawa’s lips drop into a deeper grimace, and then he’s pulling Izuku into a tight hug, dragging him out of his curled up position.

“You’re okay,” Aizawa says, and Izuku thinks he must be reassuring himself at least as much as

he's trying to reassure Izuku. "Fuck, you're alive. You're okay." Izuku melts into his grasp, letting Aizawa pull him to his chest, his teacher's warm hands tugging him up, holding him close. Izuku wraps his own arms around to Aizawa's back, his hands gripping in the bundles of the capture weapon there, and he hides his face in Aizawa's neck and shoulder, pressing himself into his teacher. He smells like clean laundry and cloves, and the smell is so *normal*, so calming and so different from the stench of blood that had filled Izuku's nose for the entire car ride here that it tugs at something in Izuku's chest and he's crying with renewed vigor. Aizawa's hands rub slow, gentle circles into his back, and he shushes Izuku gently, rocking him back and forth just the slightest bit.

"You're okay," he says, again, and Izuku can hear sirens in the distance, now. "It's okay. I've got you."

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The ride to the hospital is a blur. Izuku knows he doesn't say anything, even when the paramedics ask him questions and load him into the ambulance, sitting upright on the bed since he's really not hurt at all. Aizawa stays with him the entire time, his large hand wrapped around one of Izuku's. The expression on his face seems to grow more and more grim the longer Izuku goes without saying anything, but at least Izuku isn't crying any more. The paramedics say something to Aizawa about the bruise on the back of Izuku's right hand, the one from the IV, and Aizawa's face takes on a dark look. Izuku can't process the words, though, and even when Aizawa crouches down in front of him, asks him something, all Izuku can do is stare, blankly.

It feels like everything melts together, and Izuku is rushed into the hospital. He doesn't process what happens, doesn't remember it, but he knows that after the doctors look him over, after he's been given a hospital gown and a thick, heavy blanket wrapped over it, after he's been cleaned up and tucked into a bed and there's blood running into his arm through a needle in the crook of his elbow, his mom is there, and she's crying.

She clutches at his hand, and Aizawa, who's been with him the whole time, through every moment of it, steps back, lets Inko hold Izuku's hand gently, so carefully, like he's glass. She doesn't ask him anything, doesn't say anything except his name, and when she raises her hand to the side of Izuku's face, her skin is warm and soft. Izuku leans into the contact, leans into the pressure, and he feels fresh tears start to fall down his cheeks. It's like the spell that had come over him, that dense, impenetrable fog that had sealed his lips shut and made every word people said to him into gibberish, is broken by his mother's hand.

"Oh, baby," she says, soft and scared. "What did they do to you?" She's asking herself, not him, but Izuku reaches up the arm that doesn't have an IV going into it and rests his hand on his mother's wrist.

"I'm okay, mom," he says, voice rough and tired. He sees Aizawa's eyes widen just a touch from where he's leaning on the wall, watching the two of them. Inko sobs, heavy and strong, but a small, watery smile is on her lips.

"I'm so glad, Izuku. I'm so glad you're here. I'm so glad," she sobs, leaning forward so that she and Izuku are almost embracing. Izuku breathes in his mother's scent, lets it wash over him and soothe him as his eyes slide shut. Izuku falls asleep, warm in his mother's arms.

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After his twenty four hours of observation, Izuku is released from the hospital. He doesn't remember much of the time he'd been admitted, to be honest, but now that he's changed into a soft

long sleeved black shirt and a pair of cargo shorts his mom had brought him from home, he feels a little more himself. He's sitting on the bed in his hospital room, just waiting for the doctor to come and properly discharge him. They'd told him he'd have to get wheeled out of the hospital, that it was policy, or something, and Izuku is quietly plotting how to get out of it. His legs work *fine*.

Izuku's mom is downstairs, talking with Aizawa about when Izuku would get questioned by the police. Aizawa had practically lived in his hospital room, along with Izuku's mom, and he's heard the two of them argue about the police issue more than once already. Izuku's mom wants them to wait as long as possible, and Aizawa wants to get it over with. They'd tried to ask Izuku what he wanted, but he'd just shrugged, so they kept arguing. Izuku thinks that if he was a better person, he would just pick one so they'd stop saying things like *he's just been through hell and you want to use him for information* and *I don't want him to have to relive this over and over again*. Izuku doesn't get it. He's fine.

Izuku hears the door to his room creak open, and he glances up from where he'd been staring down at his lap, expecting to see Aizawa and Inko looking at him apologetically, but instead, he sees Uraraka, peeking her head through the door. When she meets his eyes, she perks up and steps inside the room, pushing the door open further, revealing all of the people behind her. Izuku blinks, his eyes widening, as he sees Iida, Todoroki, Kirishima, Tsuyu, Kaminari, Yaoyorozu, and Monoma standing in the hallway, all looking in at him with expressions that go through a mix of happy and concerned.

"H-Hey guys," he says, sitting up straight. He gives them a shaky smile, which Uraraka returns with a beaming grin as she steps into the small hospital room. The others follow behind, with Kirishima and Kaminari sporting matching grins. Iida and Yaoyorozu share a glance, and Izuku can see Todoroki eyeing Monoma suspiciously. Izuku wonders what that's all about.

"Hey, Deku!" Uraraka chirps, stepping forward so she's standing about three feet from him. She tips her head to the side. "We wanted to come and visit you while you were in the hospital, but I guess you're already out, huh?"

Izuku nods. "Y-Yeah, I didn't have any injuries, so..." he trails off, swallowing heavily. "Are you all okay? I saw that some of you went to Kamino."

Yaoyorozu nods sharply, but it's Todoroki who answers. "We're all okay," he says. "Bakugou is, too. Jirou and Hagakure are still recovering from the gas, but they'll be okay. You were the only one people didn't know about." His face and voice are even, like he's giving a report, but then he presses his lips into a thin line. "I'm glad you're okay," he says, quietly, and all Izuku can do is blink and nod, startled.

"Yeah, man," Kirishima says, giving Izuku a concerned smile. "We were starting to think you were gone for good, you know?" Next to him, Kaminari bites at his lip.

"C'mon, guys," Kaminari says, elbowing Kirishima playfully in the ribs. "I'm sure he's heard lotsa stuff about that already. We should cheer him up!" Kaminari grins. "Have you heard what they're gonna do at UA?"

"No?" Izuku says, blinking. Kaminari nods, excited.

"They're building dorms for us! It's gonna be like a big epic party but like, all the time," he says, giving Izuku a thumbs up and a wink. "I'm really excited!"

Izuku blinks. "R-Really?" he asks. "Huh. I didn't think about that," he says, chewing on his bottom lip, avoiding the scab he has on one part of the soft flesh from biting it with his razor teeth still on.

“Oh!” Uraraka blinks, her mouth opening slightly. “That reminds me! I bet nobody told you that sensei expelled Mineta,” she says, a smile creeping up on her lips.

“That’s right, ribbit,” Tsuyu says, pressing a finger to her chin. “When Ochako came to me with her footage, we went to talk to Nezu-sensei, since Aizawa-sensei was busy looking for you. He was very quick to take action.” She smiles slightly, and Izuku returns the expression.

“T-That’s great!” he says, then stops. “W-Well, the part where he took it seriously, n-not the part that there was a problem in the first place!” he corrects, voice stuttering, and Uraraka giggles.

“We know what you mean, silly!” she says, giving him a fond smile. “Can I hug you?” she asks, her smile slipping for just a second. “I-I know we just changed the subject, but we were really worried.”

Izuku blinks, then nods, and Uraraka’s pulling him forward into a gentle embrace, her arms slipping under his own and wrapping around his back. As Izuku hugs her back, he hears an excited whoop from Kirishima.

“Group hug!” he says, excitedly, then “If that’s okay with Midoriya, that is.”

“I-It’s okay!” Izuku replies, and he feels strong, muscular arms hug his left side as Kirishima joins in. Tsuyu and Kaminari join in next, then Iida, and Izuku hears a nervous laugh from Yaoyorozu where she stands between Todoroki and Monoma at the back of the room.

“I, uh, I’m not sure there’s enough room for the rest of us to join in,” she says, a light chuckle in her voice, and Todoroki nods, a strange expression on his face. Beside them, Monoma snorts, rolling his eyes.

“Like I’d want to hug a bunch of 1-A trash anyway,” he says, huffing and crossing his arms over his chest. Todoroki bristles, turning to fix him with an icy glare.

“Why are you here, exactly?” he asks, and Izuku’s about to step in, but Monoma shrugs, his ice blue eyes shifting to meet Izuku’s gaze.

“He may be 1-A garbage, but he still saved me,” he says, calm and confident, but Izuku knows those words mean much more than Monoma lets on. Izuku swallows, takes a deep breath, and smiles. He lets the presence of his friends and classmates comfort him.

After what feels like just a heartbeat but must really be a few minutes, he hears the sound of someone rapping their knuckles on the frame of his door, and Izuku looks up to see his doctor, a middle-aged woman with salt and pepper black hair in a high bun and smile lines around her mouth, smiling at him from the doorway.

“It’s time, Mr. Midoriya,” she says. “The nurse is on his way with the wheelchair, but your visitors will need to leave for now.” She glances over the group as they release Izuku from the hug. “It’s kind of funny, but I thought the rule was only three visitors at a time. How strange that it’s changed.” Her lips are quirked up in an amused smile, and Izuku watches as looks of shame creep over Iida and Yaoyorozu’s faces, while Uraraka, Kirishima, and Kaminari just turn to beam at the doctor. Izuku feels cold without his friends holding him, but just as he starts to feel something unhappy and upset rise in his stomach at the thought of them leaving, Todoroki is meeting his gaze.

“We’ll see you again soon,” he says, a soft smile on his lips. “And we’ll text you.” As he says it, Kaminari and Uraraka nod in agreement, and Kaminari gives him a bright thumbs up that

Yaoyorozu looks at strangely before copying. Izuku beams up at them, a bright smile that hurts the edges of his cheeks.

“Thanks, guys,” he says. “It was really great to see you all. I’m sorry I worried you.” He watches looks of fondness flash over their faces.

“We’re just glad you’re okay,” Yaoyorozu says, and then they start to filter out of the room, one by one. Izuku waits until only Todoroki, Monoma, and Tsuyu are still in the room, and then he speaks.

“Monoma?” he asks, and both Todoroki and Monoma turn to look at him. “Could I talk to you for a minute?” Izuku glances up to the doctor. “It should only take a minute, I promise. We’ll be done by the time the nurse gets here.”

The doctor arches a brow at him, but the smile doesn’t leave her face. “I’ll give you two a bit of privacy, then,” she says, stepping away from the doorway. Monoma slides his hands into the pockets of his skinny jeans and tilts his head slightly at Izuku.

“I can stick around for a minute,” he says, expression neutral, but Izuku knows he sees the wary look Todoroki gives him as Tsuyu ushers him out of the room, her thoughtful gaze catching on Izuku’s face. *I’m going to have to explain myself later.*

“What did you need?” Monoma asks, facing Izuku where Izuku is still sitting on the hospital bed, his legs dangling over the edge. Izuku swallows.

“Did you tell anyone?” he asks, swinging his legs back and forth. He wants to look down at the floor, but he can’t tear his eyes away from Monoma’s face. Monoma’s eyes narrow.

“No, I didn’t,” he says. “But I should have.” He stares Izuku down, something unreadable in his expression.

“Why didn’t you, then?” Izuku asks. “I mean, don’t get me wrong! I’m glad you didn’t. But... why?” He chews on his bottom lip, watching as Monoma’s gaze shifts to the side, his lips twitching into something of a grimace.

“I... Have you thought at all about how they found the summer camp, Midoriya?” Monoma shifts his weight from one foot to another. “Only Nezu, Vlad-sensei, and Eraserhead were supposed to know about the location at UA, and the Wild Wild Pussycats were the only ones who knew on the outside.” He sighs, his eyes sliding shut for just a moment. “I trust Vlad-sensei. And I assume you feel the same about Aizawa.” He opens his eyes, a hint of pain on his face. “But I thought about what you said. About how valuable your quirk would be in the wrong hands. Clearly, there’s an information leak somewhere. I couldn’t take that risk.” He’s scowling as he looks at Izuku, and Izuku nods, swallowing and looking down at the ground.

“R-Right,” he says, “I--Thank you.” He clears his throat, meets Monoma’s eyes again. “Thank you,” he says again. “You went through a lot, because of me. I’m sorry, but I’m thankful, too.” Izuku swallows, watches Monoma’s blue eyes widen ever so slightly. “It was nice to not die alone, for once.” Izuku smiles, slightly. Monoma stares back at him, his brows furrowing slightly and his lips parted, before he huffs out a breath of air and looks to the side.

“Whatever,” he mutters. “I’m not going to make a habit of it, just so you know.” Izuku smiles wider as he sees the hint of red on Monoma’s cheeks.

“I wouldn’t expect you to,” he replies, chuckling. Monoma meets his gaze again, before turning on

his heels and walking out of the room, but Izuku knows he'll see him again, soon.

Chapter End Notes

cw: hospitals

[discord!](#)

I HOPE U ENJOYED!!!! reading all the speculation and comments n stuff makes me SO HAPPY i love yall tysm for all the support!

intermission, part 2

Chapter Summary

last time: izuku returns to society after his captivity. he recovers in the hospital, and his friends visit him

Chapter Notes

HI GAMERS im snowed in so no class and also im bored out of my mind so writing it
isssss

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

It feels strange, sitting in his own living room with Detective Tsukauchi and Aizawa sitting across from him in two of their dining room chairs, with his mom sitting beside him on the couch, but Izuku supposes it makes sense. His mom is anxiously clutching at her mug of tea, even with Izuku right beside her at home. He can't imagine her ever agreeing to him being questioned at the police station, or even at the school.

"Midoriya," Tsukauchi says, and both Izuku and his mom look up at the same time. Tsukauchi blinks, then rubs the back of his head, embarrassed.

"Y-You can call me Izuku, for right now," Izuku says, picking at his cuticles as he stares down at the coffee table. "It'll just make things easier."

His mom nods beside him. "And you can call me Inko, i-it's really not a big deal!" She leans forward, setting her mug on the coffee table between them. It's kind of an awkward set-up, what with the chairs setting Aizawa and Tsukauchi a little higher up than Izuku and his mom are, but it's more comfortable than Izuku had been afraid it would be.

"Of course," Tsukauchi says, shifting his legs slightly where they're crossed over one another. "So then, Izuku. Are you about ready to get started?" He has his notebook open on his lap, pen at the ready. Izuku nods, hesitantly.

"You can take a break whenever you need to," Tsukauchi says, "and this isn't an interrogation. You're welcome to not answer any questions that you don't want to answer." He gives Izuku a gentle smile. "We want information, of course, but your safety comes first. Do you understand?"

Izuku blinks, then nods. "Y-Yeah," he says, even though he really doesn't get it. The information has to be the top priority, doesn't it? Izuku sees Tsukauchi's lips twitch.

"Izuku," he says, softly. "I mean it," he says, and Izuku suddenly remembers his quirk, "we don't want to do anything that hurts you." His eyes are so gentle they're almost pained, and Izuku looks away, only to see an expression of dark concern on Aizawa's face. He looks down at the table instead.

“Kid,” Aizawa says, his voice rough. “We can do this later if you want.” Izuku glances up at him, at his teacher who’s wearing a button down and slacks, who’s here without his capture weapon for Izuku. *I’ve already put him out enough as it is*, Izuku thinks. He thinks about the payphone, about the hospital, about Aizawa being there, for every moment of it. *I don’t want to cause him any more trouble*, he thinks, even though something in his chest warms at the fact that Aizawa had been willing to do that for him in the first place.

“I-I’m okay,” Izuku says, meeting Aizawa’s eyes, then Tsukauchi’s. “I can do this.” And he can. If Izuku can face villains who have killed him multiple times already, who have *tortured* him, he can answer a few questions that are meant to help him in the first place. *I have to be careful, though. I can’t leak my involvement with the Gekkeiju, not if I want a chance to get Mouse and Avenging Angel out of there safely.*

“Okay,” Tsukauchi says, nodding. He presses his pen to the paper. “First question, then. Can you tell me about what happened at the summer training camp?” Izuku nods. *That one’s easy*.

“Um, Monoma and I went to find Kouta,” he says, fidgeting with his hands. “He was at this little base he has, and we were worried about him, so we went to help him.” Izuku swallows. “But, uh, that villain--Muscular--was there, and he--” Izuku bites his lip and looks at the coffee table. “He told us he wanted to kill me and capture Monoma, and he would have killed me and Kouta for sure. So, Monoma erased his quirk, and I, uh...” Izuku blinks. “I--” He shakes his head. “I killed him,” Izuku says, and it’s small and tired.

“Did you intend to kill him?” Tsukauchi asks, and Izuku hears his mom make an affronted noise next to him, but Izuku answers before she can protest.

“N-No!” he sputters, shaking his head. “I-I just didn’t want to hold back and risk him hurting Kouta or Monoma, and I use knives, and his throat was right there, and--” Izuku stops, shakes his head. “I didn’t mean to kill him.”

“Then it’s not your fault,” Tsukauchi says, and when Izuku glances up to him, he sees a tired, worried smile on his face. “It’s self defense, in every possible way. You did nothing wrong.” Beside him, Aizawa nods.

“In that situation, even a pro likely would have had to kill Muscular in order to subdue him,” Aizawa says. “With a quirk like his and the record he had, using non-lethal force would be nigh impossible unless you had a quirk specifically suited to that, like Midnight’s.” Aizawa meets Izuku’s gaze with tired, serious eyes. “Tsukauchi’s right. You did nothing wrong.”

Izuku nods, shaky, hesitantly. He feels a warm hand rest on his knee, and he looks over to see his mom give him a quick, teary smile.

“O-Okay,” Izuku says. “Okay.”

Tsukauchi nods, writing in his notebook. “What happened after your fight with Muscular?” he asks, but beside him, Aizawa raises a hand to stop him.

“Actually, I have a question,” he says, looking at Izuku. “Why did you and Monoma leave when you did? There hadn’t been any sign of danger at that point.”

Izuku blinks. “Oh, um.” He fidgets with his hands in his lap. “We knew Kouta was out there,” he says, shrugging. “And it was getting kind of late.” Neither of those statements are *lies*, but he can tell from the way Aizawa’s eyes narrow ever-so-slightly that his teacher still has questions.

Tsukauchi casts a glance at Aizawa. "It was very lucky you two left when you did," Tsukauchi says, something off in his expression. "So, after the fight?" He tilts his notebook, showing something to Aizawa, and Izuku watches his teacher's bloodshot eyes dip down to look at the page, then up to Tsukauchi's face again. Izuku swallows nervously.

"We... we took Kouta to Aizawa-sensei, and then we went to talk to Mandalay and tell her that the villains were targeting Kacchan, and then..." Izuku blinks. "I, uh, don't remember, exactly? We fought with Leadfoot a little at one point, and then we were walking with Todoroki and Kacchan, and um," Izuku swallows, his throat feeling thick and heavy as he glances down at his lap. "The villain with a mask, Compress, I think, turned Kacchan into a marble, and he was reaching for Monoma, so I--I pushed Monoma out of the way," Izuku says, twisting his fingers together. "I pushed him out of the way, and the villain took me instead." Izuku doesn't look up from his lap, even when he hears Aizawa grunt.

"So you knew that you and Monoma were targets, but you only reported to Mandalay about Bakugou?" he asks, voice low. "Why?"

Izuku shrugs. "I--We thought we could handle it," he says. "Monoma was the one to tell her, but I--I didn't want her to stop us from going to help, so I didn't say anything, either." Izuku's shorts are very fascinating, really. He can see the stitching. It's... there. Izuku keeps his gaze fixed on his lap, not wanting to see the expressions of anyone in the room.

"You thought you could handle it," Aizawa says, voice low and dark. "So you didn't tell any of the *pro heroes* that you were a target to be *killed*, and instead you put yourself in a position to be captured in the place of Monoma." He sighs, and Izuku imagines that he's shaking his head, or maybe running a hand through his hair. Izuku isn't going to look up to confirm.

"I-It wasn't like that," Izuku says, and he hears Aizawa sigh.

"It wasn't like you were trying to get yourself killed?" Aizawa quips. "What was it like, then?"

"Aizawa," Tsukauchi says, a soft warning in his voice. "Let's stay focused."

"Right," Aizawa says, voice gruff. Izuku risks glancing up, but he regrets it when he sees Aizawa watching him. Izuku looks back down at his lap, at his hands where they're twisted up together, fingers interlocking.

"What happened after the villain captured you?" Tsukauchi asks. Izuku picks at some dry skin by his cuticles.

"Me and Kacchan were in a room with a bunch of villains," Izuku says. "Um, the League and the Gekkeiju both. A--And they knocked Kacchan out and argued about--about who should get to keep me." He tugs at a tiny piece of skin, pulls it off. Blood beads up in the tiny wound, smaller than the head of a pin. Izuku stares at it, at the bright, liquid red.

"Can you remember who was there, any names?" Tsukauchi asks. Izuku swallows. He feels strange. Distant.

"Magne, Dabi, Compress, Shigaraki, Fangirl, Leadfoot, Toga, Kurogiri, an injured woman who I think was in the Gekkeiju, and a lizard looking guy from the League." Izuku bites at his lower lip. "I don't remember if there were any others." It feels so long ago, when he was in that room, surrounded by people fighting over who got to keep him. "Leadfoot knocked me out after they decided that the Gekkeiju were keeping me. Um, they had wanted Monoma, o-originally. And the League wanted Kacchan." Izuku risks a glance upward, just in time to see Tsukauchi nod.

“You were on the League’s kill list,” he says, confirming what Izuku thinks he remembers. “We were able to obtain their hit list from the villains we captured at the training camp. It appears you were being targeted for both your role in the Hosu incident and how you stood up to Shigaraki at USJ.” Tsukauchi makes a mark on his notebook page. “What happened after that?”

Izuku swallows. “I woke up,” he says, and suddenly his mouth is dry, too dry to speak. He remembers that first reset, waking up in the cream-colored room with the cracked, aged linoleum. He can remember the door opening, remember Fury standing there, eyes shut, red hair bright even in the cheap, dim lighting. He remembers Fury’s destroyed, scarred right eye, remembers the brilliant gold of his left one. He remembers the *hell* of Heaven and Hell, remembers the pain that settled into his bones like a fire taking over a pile of dry tinder. Izuku clenches his hands in his lap, tries to breathe, but it stutters in his throat, and he makes a little gasping sound instead.

“Izuku?” his mom asks, her hand gently squeezing his knee. “Baby, what’s wrong?” Izuku swallows, shakes his head.

“Midor--Izuku,” Aizawa says, voice low and rough. “Take a deep breath.” Izuku glances up at his teacher, at his dark eyes, framed by curly hair. His teacher takes a breath in, slow and controlled and visible, and Izuku copies him, breathing in slowly. He knows this technique, knows to breathe big and obvious like that if he has to calm a civilian, and shame burns in his chest as he copies his teacher’s breathing, his chest moving slow and even.

“Let’s take a break,” Tsukauchi says, but Izuku shakes his head.

“N-No, I want to get it over with,” he says, looking up to face Tsukauchi. Tsukauchi meets his gaze, eyes serious, and he nods, the movement short and neat.

“Okay,” he says. “You woke up,” he starts, his fingers on his pen. “Do you know where you were?” Izuku swallows. He doesn’t let himself imagine any of the places, doesn’t let the images of any of the rooms form in his mind.

“I-I think it was the Gekkeiju base,” he says, squeezing his fingers together, interlocked. “Or one of them, anyway. It was a seven story building,” he says, and then he’s thinking about the elevator rides up to that top floor, to the office where Sasaki used her quirk to give him heatstroke, where she pointed a gun to Mouse’s head. Izuku swallows, makes himself breathe even as bright green eyes flash in the edges of his vision.

“Thank you, Izuku,” Tsukauchi says as he writes in his notebook, pen making small scratching noises as it moves across the page. “This kind of information is really useful. I know this is hard, but you’re helping a lot of people by doing this.” Izuku shifts his hands, fisting them in the fabric of his shorts. *Not as many as I’m going to hurt as a villain*, he thinks.

“Can you tell me anything about what happened while you were there?” Tsukauchi asks, glancing up from his notebook. Izuku swallows, then shakes his head.

“I-I shouldn’t,” he says, voice cracking. He squeezes his hands tight, feels the rough fabric of his shorts digging into his skin, painlessly. “I-I can’t,” he says, instead, and Tsukauchi nods.

“Okay. That’s okay. I’m going to ask you a couple of questions about your time there, but don’t feel pressured to answer, okay?” Tsukauchi waits, and Izuku nods. “Good. Okay, first. Did they hurt you while you were there?”

Izuku shakes his head. “No,” he says, and Tsukauchi stares at him. Izuku knows they both know it’s a lie. “They didn’t hurt me. They kept me there until Kamino was over, and then they let me

go.” Izuku’s voice is shaky, uneven, and even to him, it sounds like he’s repeating something that he’s been told to say. It’s what Miura instructed him to say, what they practiced together over and over again. *They didn’t hurt me. They kept me there until Kamino was over. They let me go. I didn’t meet anyone I didn’t already know. I didn’t hear anything.* Miura had been so gentle about it, so nice, but Izuku had understood the threat hidden in the words. *If I say something else, somebody will suffer for it. Either it’ll be me, or it’ll be Mouse, or it’ll be Miura. I can’t have someone else get hurt because I couldn’t keep my mouth shut.* Izuku is good at keeping secrets, anyway.

“Izuku,” Tsukauchi says, voice gentle. “You don’t have to answer anything you don’t want to, but we can’t help you if you’re not honest with us. You don’t have to tell me what happened, okay? We’re on your side here.” He gives Izuku a sad smile. “I’ll ask you again. Did they hurt you?”

“They didn’t hurt me,” Izuku says, and he feels distant, strange. Like his head is full of a thick cloud, all of a sudden. “They didn’t hurt me. They kept me there until Kamino was over. They let me go.” He takes a shaky breath, blinks a few times. “I didn’t meet anyone I didn’t already know. I didn’t hear anything.” He’s staring in Tsukauchi’s direction, but his vision won’t focus. He can’t make it focus, not even as he blinks, hard.

“Izuku,” Aizawa says, and Izuku tries to look at him, but he can’t even move his eyes. He feels like he’s frozen in ice, tucked away at the bottom of a frozen cold ocean. Izuku is the boy in the marble, encased in blue glass, far away.

Izuku remembers sitting in his room in the Gekkeiju tower, on that navy blue bed in the room that they’d said was his. He remembers waiting for the order that he could leave, that he could go home, remembers watching the news with Manami, remembers avoiding Fury’s gaze even with his dark sunglasses. Izuku remembers a thick haze over him, when he’d been sick and recovering in bed, and he thinks, vaguely, that he remembers being poked and prodded, remembers waking up and screaming, trying to throw himself out of bed. He remembers Sasaki, pointing the same gun at him, at a child, at him again. He remembers Mouse, remembers the fear in her red, red eyes and the fire in his chest. Izuku remembers the cream colored rooms of the basement, remembers the soot that stained Mouse’s tiny hands, the tangles in her hair. Izuku remembers the forest, set ablaze with blue fire that crackled and spit hot embers into the night sky. Izuku remembers blood that isn’t his, gushing from Muscular’s neck.

“Izuku,” he hears, firm and present. “Izuku, can you hear me?” It’s his mother’s voice, soft and calm even with the tears soaking the sound. Izuku blinks, turns. He can see his mother’s eyes, dark and green and wet, her familiar face staring back at him. Izuku swallows, and nods, even though he’s not entirely sure where he is, right now. He doesn’t feel right, doesn’t feel anchored to the ground, to the couch he realizes he’s sitting on.

“Izuku,” and that’s Aizawa’s voice, low and rough but soothing anyway. “You’re in your living room at home. You’re sitting on the couch next to your mom. It’s August 5th.” He takes a deep breath. “You’re at home.” Izuku blinks, looking to him, and he sees Aizawa blink. “You back with us, kid?”

“W-What happened?” Izuku asks, frowning. The steaming mug of tea that’s been sitting in front of his mother isn’t steaming any more. It only feels like it’s been a couple of minutes, but Izuku can’t help but shake the sensation that more time than that has passed.

“We lost you there for a minute, problem child,” Aizawa says, and Izuku can hear relief, barely concealed, in his voice. “I think we should stop for today.”

Izuku swallows. “S-Sorry,” he says, his voice hoarse. He sees his mom shake her head out of the

corner of his eye, but it's Tsukauchi who speaks.

"Don't be," he says, something sad in his eyes even as he smiles. "You've done more than enough." His eyes move over to Aizawa. "There's one last thing we want to talk to you about, though," Aizawa nods, and Izuku sees his mom tense up, slightly.

"Izuku, when you were in the hospital, we saw the wounds on your arms," Aizawa says. "I want you to start therapy as soon as possible. Between what you've just been through, your self harm," Izuku flinches, but Aizawa doesn't pause, "and your tendency to be self sacrificing, it's necessary. Your mother and I have already talked about it to some degree, but..." He trails off, his eyes shifting to Inko. "UA is having students move into dormitories. It's optional, but highly recommended for hero course students." Izuku blinks, and his mom starts speaking.

"I don't want you going back to UA," she says, her voice firm. Izuku turns to gape at her, but she doesn't let up. "You've been hurt so many times because of UA. I won't allow them to put you in danger again." She sighs, biting at her lower lip. "It's irresponsible of the school, frankly. Hosting the sports festival, even after what happened that first week? And then they let you and the other kids get so *injured*, even though it was just a festival." She shakes her head. "I've thought about this, and you won't be able to change my mind," she glances to Aizawa. "I know you care about my son, and I appreciate what you've done for him, but as his mother, this is where I draw the line. He *never* should have been put in this situation. There's no excuse."

"Mom--" Izuku starts, but Inko cuts him off, shaking her head again.

"No. You can transfer to another heroics program, somewhere that isn't so high profile. And you can start counseling at the hospital." Her eyes are wet, filled with unshed tears, but the look on her face is fierce. "I don't care if you hate me for it, but I'm not going to let you get hurt any more."

"Mom, c-can I talk to you in private?" Izuku asks, swallowing around the lump in his throat. He casts a glance at Tsukauchi and Aizawa, who both look pretty uncomfortable with the whole situation. "Please?" Aizawa frowns, and Izuku can see his mom sigh, frowning.

"Yes," she says. "Let's go to my room." She stands up, brushing off the front of her pants, then offers Izuku a hand which he takes, savoring the warmth of his mother's hand. He glances back at Aizawa and Tsukauchi as he stands up, letting his mom pull him.

"W-We'll be right back," Izuku says, and his mom nods.

"It won't take long," she confirms, and Izuku knows that's because she's decided she isn't changing her mind. Izuku hates that he *has* to change her mind.

Izuku's mom leads him away from the living room, down the short hallway and past the door to Izuku's room. She opens the door to her room, the door sliding open, and she steps inside. It's dim inside, with the light from the window filtered through her curtains, and she walks over to the window, pulling them back to let more light in as Izuku shuts the door behind him. His mother's room is neat, as always, with her bed made up with dark emerald green blankets, the wooden floor neat and swept clean. Izuku used to come in here a lot, to get into bed with his mom on lonely nights, but in the past few years, he hasn't been here much at all. The afternoon sun casts a golden square of light on the ground from where it spills through the window. Inko turns to face Izuku, her face determined.

"I meant what I said," she says, voice quiet but strong. "I can't stand by and watch you put yourself in danger. Izuku," she says, holding her hands in front of her, palms up, "why can't you just keep being a vigilante? You were helping people, and you've gotten hurt far more at UA. You can't be

arrested, right? Because you're not illegally using a quirk?" She stares at Izuku, the light from the window framing her in a golden halo. Her eyes shine even in the shadow of her hair.

"T-That's what I wanted to talk to you about," Izuku says, stepping away from the door. He doesn't think Aizawa or Tsukauchi would listen in, but he doesn't want to make it easy for them if they are. He takes a deep breath.

"What is it, baby?" Inko asks, stepping forward. Izuku meets her gaze.

"At the villain's base, there's a little girl," he says. He swallows, clenching his jaw for just a moment. "She's only six, mom. And she... they're abusing her. Torturing her. She's covered in these burns, from cigarettes, and they've told her she's *dangerous*, that she's bad because her quirk is... it's scary." Izuku bites at his lower lip, watches his mom's face flicker with pain. "I couldn't get out of the base without making a deal," he says. "I-I joined the villains. As Ace."

His mom blinks, and then sighs, her shoulders drooping as she shuts her eyes. "Oh, Izuku. You didn't."

"I did," Izuku says, swallowing. "And if I give them away now, if I betray them so early, I'm worried they'd hurt her--the little girl." He squeezes his eyes shut. "I'm going to save her, mom. They have other victims, too. I'm going to save all of them, but I have to figure out how. And they--they want me to stay at their base, sometimes." He opens his eyes. "I-If I'm in the UA dorms, it gives me a good reason to only go on weekends," he says, and he watches realization spread across his mother's face.

"You'll be safe, there," she says, exhaling slowly. "It'll keep you away from harm." She sighs, running a hand through her long green hair. "Izuku, why do you do this to me?" she asks, shaking her head.

"I'm sorry, mom," Izuku says, and he really, really is. "But the girl--they call her Mouse--she's just... I don't think anyone has ever really cared about her. I don't think she's ever really been *safe*," he says. "I can't leave her there. And we can't tell anyone. They'd *kill* her, mom." His voice breaks, and he bites his lip, watching his mom take a deep, steadying breath.

"Okay," she says, staring Izuku down, and Izuku blinks in surprise. "But you're going to text me every day. And if you're going to do something dangerous, you're going to tell me ahead of time. And if you go missing again, I'm telling the police. And your teachers." She reaches out, places a hand on Izuku's shoulder. "You're not going to go through this alone. I won't allow it."

Izuku blinks, feeling warm tears build up in his eyes. "Okay, mom," he says, the edges of his lips curling up into a smile, and then he's being pulled into a tight hug, his mom squeezing him and burying her face in his shoulder. Izuku returns the hug with his own tight grip, chuckling lightly as tears begin to run down his face.

"Don't disappear like that again," Inko says into his shoulder. "Don't scare me like that again."

"I'll try not to," Izuku whispers. "I love you, mom." Inko's arms tighten around him.

"I love you too, Izuku," she says, then she pulls back, giving him a watery smile with her hands on his shoulders. "Let's go and give your teacher a talking to," she says, giggling, and Izuku raises his eyebrows.

"Mom, don't bully Aizawa-sensei too much," he says, chuckling as he reaches up to wipe his tears away, and Inko giggles as she lets go of Izuku to do the same, wiping her face on her sleeves.

“He deserves it for letting you get kidnapped,” she says. Izuku shakes his head, still smiling as he turns to slide open the door. He walks back down the hallway, and when he and his mom step into the living room, Tsukauchi and Aizawa turn to look at them. They’ve clearly been talking to one another, and their faces are tense. Something small softens in Aizawa’s gaze, though, when his eyes settle on Izuku’s still-smiling face.

“Mr. Aizawa,” Inko says, standing beside the couch, her arms folded over her chest. Izuku blinks, awkwardly taking his seat from before. “I will allow Izuku to move into the dorms. However, I have a few conditions.” Aizawa blinks, and his expression is as blank as ever, but Izuku thinks he can make out surprise in his eyes.

“Okay,” he says, turning in his chair to better face Inko. “Let’s hear them.”

“First,” Inko says, holding up one finger. “You’re going to communicate better with the parents. I didn’t know that you suspected Izuku was hurting himself until he was in the hospital. Nurses and doctors may have confidentiality restrictions, but teachers don’t.” Inko scowls, her eyebrows furrowed, and Aizawa nods.

“You’re right, and I’m sorry. We should have informed you.” He dips his head in apology, and Inko sighs, raising another finger.

“Second, you’re going to give these kids therapy. *All* of them. Even if they don’t want it.” Inko’s eyes narrow. “They’ve all been through so much trauma, both Izuku’s class and the other heroics class. This ties into my third condition.” Inko raises a third finger. “Finally, you’re going to hire a full medical team. UA is far too big of a school for you to have only one nurse, no matter how great her quirk is for healing. I’m sure that plenty of medical workers would be more than happy to work at UA.” Inko’s lips twitch into a small smile. “I’m a registered nurse myself, and I’d be more than happy to apply.”

Aizawa blinks, opens his mouth to reply, but before he can even get a syllable out, Inko cuts him off.

“And if you don’t do this, then I’m not letting Izuku go back, and that’s not all I’ll do. I already know plenty of nice, respectful reporters. I’m sure that the press would love to air a story about how UA isn’t treating its students right,” Inko says, setting her jaw, her face determined and fierce like Izuku’s never seen it before. “Is that clear?”

Aizawa swallows, his Adam’s apple bobbing in his throat. “Crystal,” he deadpans. “I have to speak with the school board on this,” he says, glancing to Izuku, “but I don’t think it’ll be a problem.” He looks back at Inko and stands up, only to fold over at the waist in a neat bow. “You’re absolutely right. UA has failed your son, and it has failed the other students in its heroics course. I’m sorry that it got to this point in the first place, but I will do everything in my power to do what you have asked of us.” Izuku can see Aizawa’s face from this angle, can see the clear discomfort there, but somehow it makes Izuku more impressed. *Aizawa hates this*, he thinks. *He hates to have to beg like this. But he’s willing to do it for me*. Izuku feels something warm and soft bubble up in his chest.

“Good,” Inko says, then blinks. “U-Um, you can stand!” she says, waving her hands in front of her. “Goodness, I’m not usually so firm, I promise.” She chuckles, rubbing the back of her head with one hand. “I’m just worried about Izuku, you know?”

Aizawa straightens up, the beginnings of a smile on his face as he casts a sidelong glance at Izuku. “Oh, I certainly have an idea of what that’s like,” he says, and Tsukauchi chuckles lightly from where he’s still sitting in his chair before rising, turning to Inko.

“Thank you for letting us into your home to talk to your son,” Tsukauchi says, offering Inko a hand. She takes it, and Tsukauchi grips it with both hands, giving her a quick handshake. Izuku watches his mom give him a wary look.

“I still wish he hadn’t had to be questioned in the first place,” she replies, and Tsukauchi nods, looking apologetic.

“I know,” he says, dipping his head to her as he releases her hand. “From the sound of it, I’ll see you at UA,” he says, smiling. Inko returns the smile with a determined grin.

“I hope so,” she says. “And thank you, for looking after my son.” She looks over at Izuku, and their eyes meet. “Even if it shouldn’t have happened at all, I didn’t miss the way you two worked so hard to get him back.”

“I-It’s nothing,” Tsukauchi says, looking embarrassed. “Just doing our jobs!”

Inko shrugs. “Still. It’s good to know that Izuku has people in his corner, both at UA and with the police.” She smiles at Izuku, and Izuku returns it.

As Aizawa and Tsukauchi filter out of their house and Inko starts to tidy up the living room, Izuku sits on the couch. *I’m going back to UA*, he thinks, over and over. *I’m going to UA, and I’m going to live with my friends!* For the first time since the first attack from the villains at the summer camp, over a week ago, Izuku feels bright excitement burn happy and strong in his chest.

Chapter End Notes

cw: uhhh none i think?

[discord!](#)

I HOPE U ENJOYED!!!! this chapter was very fun to write :3c i like inko so much and i just need our boy to have a good mom okay

thank you for all of the unending support!!! it means the WORLD to me <3

intermission, part 3

Chapter Summary

last time: inko gave aizawa and tsukauchi a lecture after they questioned izuku

Chapter Notes

IM ALIVE!!!! oh my gosh yall i am SO SORRY for not updating the past two days!!! im in texas, and as most of you probs know, shit's CRAZY here! we didn't have power or water monday or tuesday, and it was getting dangerously cold in the dorms, so we evacuated :) we're somewhere safe now, and im SO happy to be able to write!! im planning to either do a couple of bonus one shots or an extra chapter in the next couple of days to try and compensate for the two missing chapters!! thank you all so much for your patience especially without any warning!!!

i hope you enjoy <3

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Izuku stands outside the Bakugou's front door, shifting back and forth on his feet. It's oppressively hot, the summer sun blazing down on his back, where the awning of the house doesn't quite shade him. Izuku swallows around the nerves that rise in his throat, stepping forward so that he's fully in the shade, and he knocks on the door twice, firmly.

"Coming!" a voice calls from inside, loud and feminine. Izuku knows Aunt Mitsuki's voice well, and sure enough, a few moments later, she opens the door. She's dressed in nice clothes, probably her own design--a well fitted t-shirt with embroidered poppies and a pair of tailored knee length pants. She smiles wide when she sees Izuku.

"Oh, Izuku, it's good to see you all in one piece!" she says, reaching out to rest a hand on his upper arm. "Are you here to see Katsuki? He's being a fucking brat, but it'd do him some good to see you." She ushers him inside, and Izuku lets her, his mouth open slightly to reply, but he's stopped by Masaru greeting him from the kitchen.

"Hello, Izuku," he says, wiping his hands off on the front of his apron. He's standing in front of the sink, and Izuku can see an assortment of fresh vegetables sitting on the counter beside a cutting board: bright orange carrots, pale green celery, golden onions, and earthy brown potatoes.

"H-Hi," Izuku replies, taking a few steps deeper into the house. It's both bigger than he remembers and not as big; he remembers the ceilings being higher, the furniture being taller, but he'd forgotten how wide the living room was, how big the kitchen was. He swallows as he takes in how *clean* it is, too, all cream colored carpets and reddish tan tile and warm brown granite countertops. The room reminds him of the Gekkeiju base, for some reason, even though it doesn't actually look all that similar. Izuku supposes that it's just the *luxury* of it.

"Katsuki's up in his room," Masaru says, and Izuku nods. He turns to the stairs that he knows leads

up to Kacchan's room.

"Katsuki!" Mitsuki shouts, cupping one hand around her mouth and tilting her head back to shout at the ceiling. "Izuku's here to see you!" Izuku hears an explosion from upstairs, and he cringes at the noise.

"Tell him to go the fuck home!" Kacchan shouts back, his voice rough and loud. "I don't want to see that shitty fuckin' nerd." Izuku swallows, looking at Mitsuki, whose brows drop and mouth twitches into a grimace.

"He came out to visit you, and you're coming downstairs to greet him like a polite host!" she shouts back up at him. "Izuku just got back from being kidnapped!" Izuku winces, biting at his lower lip.

"Yeah, so did I!" Kacchan shouts back. Izuku hears something slam against the floor, probably Kacchan stomping on it. "And I don't want any fucking visitors!"

"Oh, you ungrateful fucking brat," Mitsuki snarls, and Izuku takes a step back, away from her. "You've been back for almost two weeks already!" Izuku edges towards the door.

"I-I can leave," Izuku says, but she ignores him. Izuku doesn't remember her being quite so aggressive, but then again, he hasn't been to this place in years.

"Yeah, two weeks that you haven't left me the fuck alone!" Kacchan yells. Izuku takes a few more steps back, and Mitsuki turns to look at him.

"Ignore the brat," she says, smiling. "You can just go on up whenever you'd like. He'll deal with it."

"I-I think I'll come back later," Izuku says, giving her a half hearted smile and backing away slowly. He hears a bang from upstairs and rhythmic chopping of a knife against a cutting board.

"Nonsense!" Mitsuki says, a grin splitting her face. "Katsuki's just being difficult. He'll be happy to see you." She takes a step toward Izuku, and Izuku feels something sharp and anxious rise up in his throat.

"Mitsuki, let the boy go," Masaru says from in the kitchen. "He can come back when Katsuki isn't in such a bad mood." Izuku thinks, absently, that recovering from a kidnapping is a little bit more than just a bad mood, but Kacchan's parents probably know him better than Izuku does, so who is he to judge?

"Fine, fine," Mitsuki says, sighing and rolling her eyes. "But you should really come back soon, Izuku. Katuski could use a good influence. You're so polite." She gives him an eager smile.

"Sure," he replies, returning the smile awkwardly. "I'll come back soon." The words feel false on his lips as he steps backward, slipping out the door into the afternoon sun. The door shuts quietly, but Izuku can still hear shouting as he steps away, turning and walking quickly down the street. He tries to put it out of his mind, but the entire interaction weighs on him heavily as he makes his way back to his house. Izuku isn't sure if it's because Kacchan didn't want to see him, or if it's the way Mitsuki acted about it, but either way, he doesn't like it.

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When Izuku slips away from the house and his mom next, it's to walk to the hardware store. It's only a short distance away, but it's still warm enough out that by the end of it, there's a thin sheen

of sweat on his brow. Izuku finds himself watching the bugs that crawl and climb in the long grass that pokes up in the narrow space between the sidewalk and the brick wall next to it. There are tiny little grasshoppers, green and pink, that sit on the longest stalks, their huge eyes watching him, and there are gnats so tiny that Izuku can't make anything out beside the fact that they're there at all, flitting from plant to plant. He's sure there must be ants, too, but he can't actually see them except for where a line of black sugar ants climb the brick wall, each carrying a piece of something. Izuku thinks it might be grass seeds, but he honestly can't tell.

When Izuku gets to the hardware store, he and Miura make eye contact through the glass even before he's pushing the door open. She's dressed in a grey tank top and a pair of cropped jeans, and Izuku's surprised to see she doesn't look as bruised as normal. Even the small bruises that always wrap the bones of her fingers are gone.

"Midoriya," she greets as he pushes open the glass door and steps into the shop, the bell ringing softly to announce his entrance. "I was starting to wonder if you'd make it here at all." Izuku blinks, meeting her eyes, and he can see the admonishment there.

"I've had a lot of eyes on me," he replies, biting at his lower lip. "I-I didn't want someone to follow me and wonder why I'd come to a hardware store of all things so quickly." Miura nods, her eyes softening.

"I figured it was something like that," she says, sighing and rolling her shoulders back. "Anything to report?" Her eyes rest on his face, not quite meeting his eyes, but close enough.

"Yeah," Izuku says, swallowing. "UA is moving the hero students into the dormitories. I'll be staying there during the weekdays," he says, biting the flesh on the inside of his cheek as Miura's gaze sharpens. "I-Is that going to be a problem?"

"A problem?" she echoes, voice thoughtful. "No. But it might make a few things more complicated. You'll need to be very careful when you leave at night." She breathes out. "Speaking of. Your costume is nearly ready, but... the boss has made a decision regarding your public status." She sighs. "You won't be openly a member of the Gekkeiju, and we'd like you to avoid revealing that you work with us until you receive orders to the contrary." She meets his gaze, then, dark eyes boring into his. "It'd be far too suspicious, for you to be captured by us and then a vigilante about your age to become a member so soon after."

Izuku blinks, then nods. "O-Okay, that shouldn't be a problem," he replies, voice quiet. Miura smiles, slightly.

"If anything, it'll make things easier for you, I'd assume," she says, then leans forward reaching under her desk. "I've got something for you." She pulls out a small grey flip phone. "This has the number of all of the lieutenants and Mr. Clean. I'll use this to give you assignments and simple orders, but most things will be done in person. Also," she says, swallowing and looking to the side. "You'll be reporting to Kazuo a fair bit as well. It can't be helped; he's taken a liking to you." Izuku swallows.

"A liking to me?" he echoes, and Miura nods sharply, still not meeting his gaze.

"Like I said," she says, throat bobbing as she swallows. "It can't be helped. If I were to try and stop it, it'd only make things worse for the both of us." She sighs, her eyes shutting for just a moment. "It's easier if you give him what he wants," she says, her eyes sliding over to Izuku. "You should go out as Ace soon. You've taken breaks this long before, right?"

Izuku nods. "Y-Yeah. Won't it look suspicious, though?" He fidgets with the sleeves of his long

sleeved shirt. Miura shrugs, holding out the flip phone. Izuku takes it.

“Not if you don’t act any different,” she says. “If anyone asks where you’ve been, just act confused. You don’t interact with people every time you go out anyway, right?”

Izuku nods. “Y-Yeah.” He holds the flip phone in his hands, turns it over. It’s turned off, and when Izuku switches it on, it doesn’t seem to have anything on it other than texting and calling.

“Keep that hidden. Check it once or twice a day, but don’t keep it on your person unless you know you’re going to need it,” Miura says. Izuku nods, shutting the phone off and sliding it into the pockets of his cargo shorts.

“T-Thanks,” Izuku says, and Miura frowns.

“Don’t thank me,” she says, looking to the side. “I’m just telling you the basics so you don’t get yourself arrested in a day.” She sighs, long and slow. “Go home. People are probably wondering where you went. It hasn’t even been a week.”

Izuku blinks, then nods. “R-Right,” he says, turning and walking out of the store. He resists the urge to look back to see if Miura is watching as he walks away, down the brightly lit sidewalk.

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When Izuku dreams, it is in color. It’s the cream walls of the Gekkeiju’s basement, the grey soot that streaks Mouse’s little hands, and the blue of the flames that crackled and burned through the forest. He dreams of the taste of sour acid in his mouth as he lies on cold, cracked linoleum, the smell of a campfire permeating the room Mouse was kept in, the scent of fresh, green hay as Izuku stared into Sasaki’s glowing green eyes. Izuku dreams of Heaven and Hell, dreams of the lightning-sharp pain that sits in the spaces inside his bones, the soft, soothing comfort that filled his veins and blanketed him in happiness.

When Izuku wakes up in his bed, gasping and shaking and covered in a cold sweat, that’s the worst part. Not the way thinking about the basement fills him with dread and fear, not the way his heart squeezes when he remembers the terrified, empty look to Mouse’s eyes, but the way he finds himself thinking about Fury’s quirk, about the “heaven” of Heaven and Hell. Izuku hates the way he dreams about it, the way he can’t help but think about it, at times.

The only thing Izuku’s felt that comes *close* is the euphoria of bleeding out, the rush of pure nothing that washes over him in the moments before he dies from slitting his wrists. Cutting is the same *type* of feeling, but not as strong. Maybe that’s why Izuku keeps finding himself drawing warm baths in the days since he’s come home. He doesn’t dare to cut himself and leave it, but there’s something so nice about being able to sink into his bathtub, being able to feel himself relaxing and dissolving into the warmth of the water.

The moment he craves, of course, is after he’s soaked for a moment, after his body is clean and warm, and he digs the too-sharp blade of a knife into his wrists or his throat or the edge of his thigh, where the femoral artery lurks below the surface. Izuku probably shouldn’t kill himself every night, but, well, it’s better than letting himself think too hard about how much he *misses* Fury’s quirk, even though the heaven part had only been used on him *once*. How weak is he, that he’s still thinking so much about it, even after a week?

Izuku limits himself to once a night, of course. He’s not trying to do any real damage. *It’s like bonus quirk training, really*, he thinks. *It’s not like it really hurts me. I wake up every time, so it’s okay*. Izuku doesn’t let himself think too hard about what he’ll do once he’s in the dorms. He’s not

sure, but he assumes they'll have communal bathrooms of some kind, and he isn't brave enough to try and bleed himself to death in one of those unless he has to. He wouldn't want to get caught and survive the ordeal.

Sometimes, when he's bleeding out into the bathwater, the sounds of water echoing in the quiet room, interrupted only by his quick, shallow breaths, he thinks about the sports festival, so long ago. He thinks about Todoroki, catching him bleeding out not once, but twice. He thinks about how his friend had tried to save him, had pressed his palms into Izuku's bleeding wound, had tried to save him with all of his might. Izuku thinks about how Todoroki remembers, just a little. *It's strange*, he thinks as the bathwater takes on a red color and a metallic scent. *Why does he remember?* Monoma remembers for a reason, but Todoroki has no copying quirk to speak of.

Izuku thinks about things like that, thinks about how any of his friends have seen him die and just don't remember it, instead of letting himself think about the Gekkeiju or what he's gotten himself into. He feels himself drain away, and as he eyes shut, sometimes, he thinks he feels a tugging sensation before he falls unconscious. He wonders if it's death, coming to claim him.

--

The sun is already hot and bright by the time Izuku steps out of the train station and onto the street that will take him to UA. He's glad that they'd let him send most of his stuff in advance, so he only has his backpack, stuffed with a few things he'd either needed for the few days between sending his bags and moving out or that he hadn't wanted to send without him there to watch them, like his razors and his Ace costume. His knives in and of themselves aren't suspicious--he's a hero in training who fights armed--but the razors were sort of... unambiguous. Plus, Izuku had wanted to be able to use them. He might not be able to leave cuts on his arms, but that didn't mean he couldn't cut before he killed himself.

Izuku walks down the street quickly, his eyes already on the shining blue surface of what must be one of the new dorm buildings. He can see a few of them, peeking up over the shorter buildings that lay between him and the campus. Izuku finds himself watching the reflection of the clouds and the blue sky in the material as he approaches. *How tall are they? Five, six stories? It's enough to kill me with a head first drop, but low enough that I wouldn't want to use it unless it's an emergency*, Izuku thinks to himself as he walks through UA's gate and onto the campus. He can see a lot of buildings, now that he's here, and he wonders if they let general studies and support courses move onto campus, too. It would only make sense; after all, there should only be six hero course classes. Izuku can see at *least* ten dorm buildings.

He can also see some of his friends at the steps to the first dorm building, the one closest to the gate. He supposes it makes sense, given that they're class 1-A. He can see heads of red, yellow, and pink hair off to one side, standing next to who Izuku thinks is Jirou. She's facing toward him, so she's easier to see. Off to the other side, Izuku can see Iida, tall and recognizable next to Todoroki, whose distinctive hair gives him away even though he's looking away. Izuku guesses that they're talking to Yaoyorozu and Uraraka, and as he gets closer, he can see that Tsuyu is standing with them, too.

Izuku picks up the pace, and he can see the exact moment that Uraraka spots him, her grin growing on her face as she raises a hand and waves to him. Izuku smiles, his cheeks hurting with how wide it is, and he waves back to her, the motion big and dramatic. He hadn't realized just how much he missed his friends, even in just the week that he was away from them. As he approaches, his feet knocking against the concrete as he jogs forward, Iida and Todoroki turn to face him, too. Yaoyorozu and Tsuyu look up at him, both of their faces sprouting smiles, too.

“Hey, guys!” Izuku says, slowing to a stop. “It feels like it’s been forever,” he says, wrapping his hands over the straps of his backpack. Uraraka nods, quickly, her head bobbing up and down, and Iida nods quickly.

“It has been far too long!” Iida exclaims, an eager smile on his face. “How have you been, Midoriya?” He glances over Izuku, his eyes catching on his long sleeves. “Oh, you’re still in your winter uniform! Did you not receive your summer one yet?”

Izuku swallows, putting a smile on his face. “Oh, no, I just get cold easily indoors, so I prefer it!” he says, tipping his head to the side. “I sunburn easy, too, so it just made the most sense.” Yaoyorozu nods, looking thoughtful.

“That is really quite smart, Midoriya,” she says, putting a hand to her chin. “It’s like when people use an umbrella to block the sun, but you don’t have to carry it with you.”

“Exactly,” Izuku says, smiling and nodding. If his smile is in relief at them not questioning him and not because he’s happy Yaoyorozu agrees with his fake reason, well, nobody needs to know that.

“Won’t you get hot, though?” Tsuyu asks, tipping her head to the side. “It’s quite warm today, ribbit.” Her gaze is a little too thoughtful for Izuku’s liking, and he shrugs, trying to make the motion look easy and not forced.

“I’d rather sweat a little on the walk over than be shivering in class all day,” he says. Tsuyu nods.

“I get it,” she says. “I get cold easily myself, so in the winter, I overcompensate.”

“Nevermind about his uniform,” Uraraka says impatiently. “How are you feeling, Deku? We’ve been worried sick about you!” Izuku blinks.

“O-Oh, I’ve been fine!” he says. “I didn’t mean to worry any of you, but my new phone just came in yesterday, and I didn’t have anyone’s numbers except Kacchan and he’s ignoring me right now, so--” Uraraka cuts him off by sticking out her hand.

“Well, hand it over! I’ll text myself from your phone, and then I can share everyone’s contacts with you and we can add you to the group chat,” she says, wiggling her hand impatiently. Izuku blinks, then slides his new phone out of his pocket and sets it in Uraraka’s open palm. It’s a different one from his Gekkeiju phone, *obviously*, and he got it in bright silver so that there’d be no chance of mistaking one phone for the other. Uraraka starts typing on the phone just as Todoroki tips his head and starts to speak.

“Look,” he says, jerking his head forward. “Aizawa-sensei.” Izuku blinks and turns, and sure enough, Aizawa is approaching, walking slowly with his hands shoved in his pockets and his capture scarf hiding the lower half of his face. Izuku wonders how he’s not burning up with heat. Izuku’s a little warm in his blazer; he can’t imagine what his teacher’s hero uniform must be like.

Aizawa glances up at them as he approaches, but his face remains as impassive as always. Izuku swallows nervously as he steps up the stairs, moving to face the class. Izuku can see that everyone’s here now, and he suspects Aizawa was waiting for that to be the case before he addressed the class.

“Alright,” Aizawa says, rolling his shoulders back and facing them. “First off, I want to say that I’m glad to see you all made it here safely.” A few whispers break out among Izuku’s classmates, but they quickly settle down as Aizawa keeps talking. “I’m going to give you all a briefing about

the dorms, but before that, there's something I need to say."

"Uh oh," someone says from off to the side. Aizawa shoots a glare in their general direction.

"At the end of the training camp, the plan had been to give you all your provisional licenses," Aizawa says. "But that didn't happen. Some of you, however, decided to act like you had them anyway." His eyes narrow. "Kirishima, Iida, Todoroki, and Yaoyorozu, you decided to take it upon yourselves to go to Kamino on that evening with two members of class 1-B." A few students gasp softly, but Aizawa keeps talking. "I understand that you wanted to save your friends, but what you did was beyond irresponsible. And from what I've heard," he says, gaze sweeping over the class, "the rest of you knew what they were planning and decided not to tell anyone. As it is, if it weren't for All Might's sudden retirement, I would be expelling every member of this class except for Jirou, Hagakure, Bakugou, and Midoriya." A quiet falls over the class as they all stare at their teacher.

"I think it goes without saying why that's the case," Aizawa continues, sighing. "Regardless of your reason, the fact is that you betrayed the trust us teachers have placed in you, so some things will be changing. I would much appreciate it if you would follow the rules that you've been told about time and time again," he says, his eyes sticking on Iida and Todoroki where they stand beside Izuku. "If you did, that would go a long way toward restoring our trust in you." He turns, walking up the stairs. "That's it for now. Let's go ahead and get started. Moving in should be fun," he says, his voice still its usual deadpan.

The class is silent, and Izuku can see everyone staring at each other, grimaces on frowns on their faces. Kacchan scoffs from where he's standing beside Kirishima and Kaminari, and Izuku watches as he digs around in one of his pockets and produces a wad of paper money, holding them out at Kirishima with a scowl on his face. Kirishima stares at it, blinking.

"Just take it, fucking Shitty Hair," Kacchan says, kicking at the concrete ground underneath him. "You're making it into a big deal."

Kirishima swallows, reaching out and taking it with wide eyes. "F-For the night vision goggles...? How did you?" He holds the money, just staring at it, and the rest of the class is still too quiet. Kacchan scoffs, grabbing Kaminari by his collar and dragging him.

"C'mere, Pikachu," he says, and Kaminari gives a vague noise of protest before he's behind the bushes with Kacchan. Izuku stares, blinking away sunspots as a burst of bright electricity fills the air, and Kacchan is suddenly pushing out Kaminari, whose face has gone blank and happy as he gives an enthusiastic thumbs up.

"Yay!" he says, bouncing in place a little, and Kacchan comes out of the bushes, brushing off the front of his pants. Jirou snickers, Izuku's head turning at the sudden noise, and he sees that most of Kacchan's group is giggling, the tension broken. Izuku glances at his own friends and sees that it's not the case for them; Yaoyorozu, Iida, and Todoroki are looking *far* too guilty, Tsuyu and Uraraka far too angry.

"You guys went to try and save Kacchan?" Izuku asks, his eyes meeting Todoroki's mismatched ones. Todoroki swallows visibly.

"We... we had hoped you would be there, too," he says, his gaze dropping down and to the side. Izuku blinks.

"Y-You would have done that for me?" Izuku asks, his voice small. Uraraka's brows furrow.

“Of course they would have,” she says. “If it hadn’t been a stupid, reckless idea in the first place, I would have, too.” Beside her, Tsuyu nods, but it’s Yaoyorozu who speaks next.

“I know that Kendou and Monoma were there specifically for you, Midoriya,” she says. “I don’t think any of us wanted any of our classmates hurting. It was truly unfortunate that I only had placed a tracker on one villain,” Yaoyorozu says, frowning and looking down. “If I had thought to put one on more of them, you could have been rescued and you wouldn’t have...” she trails off, swallowing.

“I-It’s okay, really,” Izuku says, raising his hands placatingly. “I-I survived, didn’t I?” he says, cracking an awkward smile. His friends look at him, their expressions ranging from skeptical to accepting, but it’s enough to break the tension between everyone, and the air feels lighter as they turn to follow Aizawa into the dorm building.

It’s dimmer inside the building, but the lights are on, and Izuku blinks as his eyes adjust. It’s *nice* inside, with floor to ceiling windows everywhere and thick, plush green rugs covering most of the brown tile floor. The walls are painted a bright spring green to match the couches, a few shades lighter than the rugs, and Izuku finds himself really, really grateful that they hadn’t picked cream for the walls or floors. Izuku can see a kitchen up ahead, with shiny, stainless steel appliances and a brown and green tile backsplash.

“It’s a freaking mansion,” Uraraka breathes next to him as they step into the building, the cool air conditioning washing over them. Izuku has to agree. It’s nice, incredibly so, but he’s grateful that the decor isn’t so fancy and luxurious. It’s homey, welcoming. Izuku doesn’t know what he’d do if his new home reminded him of the Gekkeiju base.

“There’s a building for each class, as I’m sure you’d gathered from the 1-A on the outside of this one,” Aizawa explains. “All of the first year dorms are together for all of the classes, then second years, and so on. The boys’ wing is on the left, girls’ on the right. Common space is shared. The laundry rooms and baths are also separated by gender, although they’re all on this floor.” Aizawa looks around. “I’m sure you can figure out most of this, but the faculty dorm is just across the main pathway, and you should all have my number. Don’t hesitate to call or text if you have any trouble or need help. If I’m out of town, I’ll let you know ahead of time so you know to call Mic instead.”

“You each have private rooms,” Aizawa continues. “You should have been given a room number and your keys in the mail already,” he says, glancing over the class. Izuku nods, sliding a hand into his pocket and feeling the keys on his key ring, the metal warm from his body heat.

“Your stuff should already be in your rooms. You have all of today to get settled in and unpacked. Tomorrow I’ll go over how things will operate, but I’ll go ahead and let you know that you need to let me know before you leave campus.” Aizawa looks over the class. “If there aren’t any questions, you’re free to go.”

Izuku stands, blinking, as the class starts to disperse. He swallows and heads toward the stairs, his head buzzing with thought as he trails behind Todoroki and Iida. *Let him know before we leave, huh?* Izuku had been expecting as much, but he still wishes that it wasn’t a rule. He’ll have to test to see if there’s any actual sensors to let Aizawa know if he leaves, or if it’s just a problem if he gets caught. Izuku isn’t sure how he’s going to go out as Ace if there’s some kind of sensor system.

“What floor are you on, Midoriya?” Todoroki asks, glancing down at Izuku. Izuku blinks.

“T-The second,” he replies, and Todoroki nods.

“I’m on the fifth,” Todoroki says, glancing at the stairs ahead of him. “I’ll see you later?” Izuku smiles, the movement gentle as it creeps up his lips.

“O-Of course,” he replies as he steps off of the stairs and onto the second floor. It’s mostly empty up here, although Izuku can see Aoyama through the door to his room, which is wide open. Izuku shuffles down the hallway, glancing at the labels on the walls next to the doors. The wall is the same green color as the first floor, but the floor is a soft, polished wood. Izuku finds his door is the second one from the stairs, and he fumbles with his keys for a moment, making little clinking noises as they knock against each other, before he finds the right one and slips it into the lock, turning it easily. He pushes the door to his room open to find a stack of boxes and his bags.

Izuku sighs, glancing around the room, at the bed, desk, the refrigerator, and the tall sliding glass door that leads out onto the balcony. *I’ve got a lot of work to do*, he thinks to himself, shutting his door and rolling up his sleeves. *Better get started!*

Chapter End Notes

cw: uhhhh i think there's mention of vomiting, heavily implied child abuse, more self harm references than usual

[discord!](#)

i hope you enjoyed!!!! there's only going to be a few more "intermission" chapters before we get to the next major arc :D im really excited for the stuff i have going on for the provisional license exam arc :D :D it's gonna be way fun to write (and hopefully to read)

thank you all as always for the support!!! it means the world to me <3 sorry again for the lateness of this chapter!! i hope to make up for it soon

intermission, part 4

Chapter Summary

last time: izuku meets up with miura and then it's time to move into the dorms!

Chapter Notes

HI GAMERS here's a longer chap for you bc you're that pog

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Izuku sighs, tipping his head back to look up at his ceiling. His bed is soft underneath him, the green and black comforter his mom had gotten him even nicer than he'd expected it to be after reading the Amazon reviews for it. The rug he'd put on the floor, a deep black, fluffy thing, is soft and cool under his bare feet, and as he glances forward to take in his new room, he has to say he feels pretty good about it.

His desk is set up with a lot of pens and pencils, all neatly organized, and he's got his lamp angled *just* right, so that he can easily study. The bookshelf is filled with his notebooks, with the ones containing info about his quirk and the quirks of the Gekkeiju members hidden behind the books you can see from the outside, of course. The top of the shelf holds his All Might figures--he couldn't leave *all* of his All Might merch at home, even if he's not quite as big of a fan at this point. He's also got a little Present Mic, an Eraserhead, a Snipe, a Midnight, and two Thirteens, so he thinks it rounds the shelf out quite nicely, all things considered. He'd meant to order an Ectoplasm too, but they'd been sold out.

His walls are mostly covered in various hero posters, but he's also got a tapestry his mom had gotten him, one that shows a forest scene with a big, bright full moon hanging over pine trees coated in silver snow. It's pretty, and it makes the room look bigger with it hanging over his bed, he thinks. His curtain is a green and black striped blackout curtain, but he has it pushed to the side right now, with the glass door showing his little balcony and a view of the forested part of campus. He doesn't have much on the balcony, mostly because he hadn't actually expected them to *get* one, but he put the metal folding chair he'd brought out there. Izuku hopes it doesn't rust.

Just as Izuku's starting to wonder what he should do now, there's a knock at his door, quick and light. Izuku stands up, stretching as he crosses the small room to open the door. He blinks when he sees Uraraka, Kaminari, and Hagakure standing outside, bright grins on their faces (or at least on the first two. Izuku doesn't know about Hagakure).

"Hey, Deku!" Uraraka says, smiling. "Kaminari had a really good idea, and we wanted to come get you before we started!" She tips her head in Kaminari's direction, and the boy nods excitedly, his blonde hair swishing with the movement.

"We're gonna have a room contest!" Kaminari says, and Izuku knows he hears giggles. "You're first, so..." Kaminari steps aside, revealing much of the class. Not everyone is there, but Izuku can see pretty much all of them save Kacchan and Tsuyu.

“O-Oh,” Izuku says, blinking and stepping aside, standing in front of the door that opens to his closet. He doubts they’ll try to look inside, but better safe than sorry.

“Whoa, it’s full of hero merch,” Hagakure says, leaning in, the top half of her torso in the room.

“I’m surprised there isn’t more!” Uraraka says. “Deku has fanboy energy, you know?” Izuku blinks.

“W-What does that mean?” he splutters, just as Ashido nods sagely as she pokes her head in over Kaminari’s shoulder to look inside.

“He really does, doesn’t he?” Ashido says, laughter in his voice. “He’s a hero fan through and through!”

Kaminari nods. “I bet he would have been with the rest of you if he wasn’t kidnapped,” he says, leaning back to elbow Kirishima, who Izuku hadn’t even seen standing there. “He totally woulda done something stupid like that!”

Kirishima laughs awkwardly. “I mean, I definitely would have invited him,” he says, rubbing the back of his head. “He’s real close to Bakugou and all.” Izuku blinks.

“I-It was your idea?” he asks, tipping his head to the side and watching as Kirishima’s cheeks color red.

“I-It wouldn’t have been very manly to just leave you two,” Kirishima says, looking to the side. “Yaomomo had the tracker and everything, and we thought it would lead to at least one of you two, so it just made sense.” He folds his arms over his chest. Izuku blinks, then smiles.

“I probably would have gone with,” Izuku says, feeling his own face start to flush as Kirishima looks up at him. “T-That kind of reckless thing is sort of my brand at this point, right?” He gives Kirishima a smile, even though he can feel the gazes of his classmates watching the two of them.

“Exactly!” Kaminari says, giving them a thumbs up. “It’s a totally Midoriya thing to do.” He pauses then sighs. “Now I kinda wish I’d gone with y’know? I thought you guys were just joking, not gonna lie.” He looks kind of forlorn, but then Ashido socks him in the arm.

“It was still a dumb idea, dude!” she says, shaking her head. “We’re lucky it turned out as good as it did.” She rolls her eyes, but there’s a fond smile on her face all the same. “Let’s go to Aoyama’s room already. We’ve seen everything there is to see here.” Izuku watches as everyone nods.

“I bet Aoyama’s room glitters,” Uraraka says as people start to pull away from Izuku’s room. Izuku waits until the last person is gone before slipping out of his room and locking it behind him. It clicks softly, and as he moves to go to Aoyama’s room, he’s startled by Todoroki, standing beside him.

“You’re locking it?” he asks, head tipped to the side so that the white half of his hair falls away from his face. Izuku blinks up at him, suddenly very aware of how much *taller* Todoroki is than him.

“U-Um, yeah!” Izuku replies, swallowing and smiling awkwardly. “I-It’s good to get in the habit, you know?” He slides his keys into his pocket and takes a step away from the door. *I would really, really prefer to avoid people seeing what I have hidden in my closet*, he thinks to himself--the honest answer.

“Right,” Todoroki replies. His gaze seems to move over Izuku’s face, and Izuku feels his cheeks

heating up under the scrutiny. “I think we’re going to Aoyama’s room, next,” he says, looking up and to the side, where the class is already oohing and ahing at something Izuku can’t quite see.

“R-Right!” Izuku replies, letting Todoroki lead the way. They stand mostly at the edge of the class, but Izuku can see into Aoyama’s dorm well enough. *Sparkly... Uraraka was right*, he thinks. Todoroki hums next to him, low and quiet.

“You would have gone with us to save Bakugou?” Todoroki asks, voice quiet enough that Izuku’s pretty sure he’s the only one that’ll be able to hear. He looks at Todoroki again, sees the curious look on his friend’s face. Izuku nods.

“Y-Yeah, I mean, Kacchan’s my friend,” he says. Todoroki’s brows furrow ever so slightly.

“He gave you a lot of scars for a friend,” Todoroki points out, and Izuku blinks, his gaze flickering to Todoroki’s own scar, red and mottled around his eye.

“He did,” Izuku acknowledges. “But that was a long time ago. And he’s different, now.”

Todoroki raises an eyebrow. “Last year isn’t a long time ago,” he says, and Izuku frowns.

“How do you know when it stopped?” he asks before he can stop himself. “I didn’t think I’d given you that much detail.” He stares up at Todoroki, who looks to the side.

“Bakugou told me,” Todoroki mutters. “I don’t think you should forgive him so easily. It seems...” he takes a slow breath. “It seems like you think it was your fault, not his. That it’s somehow acceptable just because he isn’t doing it any more.” Izuku blinks, biting at his lip.

“I... I don’t really want to talk about this, Todoroki,” Izuku admits, softly, and from the way Todoroki glances at him sharply, he thinks it reveals far more than he intended it to. “But for what it’s worth, Kacchan has always meant a lot to me. Whether what happened was my fault or his, he’s still someone I care about.” Izuku looks away from Todoroki, watching as their classmates move from Aoyama’s dorm to the next one. “I think we’re moving,” he says, and Todoroki turns, following his gaze.

“So we are,” Todoroki murmurs, casting a glance back at Izuku as he moves to follow. “I’m sorry,” he says, sighing. “I shouldn’t pressure you, it’s just...”

Izuku nods, stepping forward to keep up with the class. “I know,” he says. “Just... don’t judge Kacchan too harshly, okay? Things really have changed a lot.” He smiles softly, but it feels sad on his face. “I wish he’d talk to me, though.”

Todoroki blinks. “He hasn’t been talking to you?” he echoes, confusion on his face. “Why not?”

Izuku snorts. “I wish I could tell you,” he replies. “Has he been talking to you, then?” He glances up at Todoroki, who nods, the movement short.

“We don’t talk much,” Todoroki replies, “but he always answers my texts, and he’s in the class group chat.” Todoroki’s face twists strangely, and Izuku doesn’t quite know how to interpret it. “Uraraka is adding you to the group chat, isn’t she?” Izuku blinks, pulling out his phone.

“Y-Yeah,” he says, scrolling through his contacts. “She’s added everyone already, but I’m not in any group messages... she must have gotten busy moving in and stuff.” He pauses, hovering over Todoroki’s contact. “My number should still be the same, in case you want to text me.” Izuku looks up from his phone just in time for Todoroki to nod.

“Right,” he says, but he looks lost in thought. Izuku frowns, following Todoroki’s gaze, but the other boy is just staring at the wall. There’s something dark on his face, something that Izuku doesn’t understand.

“Todoroki?” Izuku asks. He wants to reach up and tug on Todoroki’s sleeve, but it doesn’t seem like a good idea right now. “Is everything okay?”

Todoroki blinks, looking back over to him. “I’m fine. I was just thinking about Kamino,” he replies. “When we saw that it was just Bakugou, that you weren’t there, I think we all feared for the worst. And then when you didn’t show up in the aftermath of the fight, when All Might retired and you still weren’t there...” He swallows, and Izuku can see his throat bob with the motion.

“You thought I was dead,” Izuku finishes for him, voice quiet. It doesn’t really matter, though. At this point, the class is far enough ahead that he doesn’t think they’d hear them anyway, not with how much they’re chattering and laughing about whatever is in Tokoyami’s room. Izuku swallows as he watches Todoroki’s face, mismatched eyes shaded by his split hair as he nods. The motion is sharp, quick.

“I don’t know how much you could see inside the marble,” Todoroki starts, “but at the end, there was a moment... there was a moment when I reached out for you. For both of you. And I missed. I failed you. So whatever happened to you, whatever you went through when you were with the villains, it’s--”

“Don’t,” Izuku interrupts him, voice firm and maybe a little too loud. “Don’t say it was your fault,” he says, gritting his teeth as Todoroki looks at him, his eyes widening just barely. “You didn’t do this. The villains did.” Todoroki swallows again, shaking his head.

“Midoriya, if you’d died--” he starts, but he cuts himself off even before Izuku starts talking.

“Then it still wouldn’t be your fault,” Izuku says, reaching out. He puts a hand on Todoroki’s chest, his palm resting flat against his shirt, warmth soaking through. Izuku can feel Todoroki’s heartbeat, can feel him gasp slightly, but Todoroki doesn’t move.

“What happened, Midoriya?” Todoroki asks, and Izuku can feel the vibrations through his chest, through his sternum and ribs. “What happened to you?” Izuku shakes his head.

“It’s not your fault,” he says. “What I did is my fault, and what the villains did is theirs. You can’t blame yourself.” Izuku feels the warmth of Todoroki, the unnatural warmth. Maybe it’s because his hand is on Todoroki’s left side. Maybe Izuku’s hand is just cold. Either way, it reminds him of Mouse, in a strange way. Fire in the chest, fire in the lungs, in the bones and in the throat. Izuku takes a deep breath.

“I know,” Todoroki says. “I know, but...” He takes a deep breath, reaches a hand up to hold Izuku’s wrist, his fingers cool and gentle. “I still wish I could have done something to help.” His fingers press into Izuku’s skin, still gentle and still soft, but the contact is grounding, soothing. Izuku tries to take a deep breath, but it catches in his throat.

“I-I wish you could have, too,” Izuku says, and his voice cracks, embarrassingly. Todoroki looks down at him, blinks, slow and sure, and then Izuku is being pulled into a hug. It’s strange, because half of Todoroki burns with feverish heat and the other half is chilled, too cold to be a normal person, but his arms are strong where they’re wrapped around Izuku’s back, and Izuku melts into the contact.

“Is this alright?” Todoroki asks, quietly. “I’m not really experienced when it comes to stuff like

this,” he says, voice soft, uncertain. Izuku snorts a quiet laugh into his chest.

“I-It’s perfect, Todoroki,” he says, and Todoroki’s hand grips slightly tighter in the back of Izuku’s uniform. They stay like that for a moment, Izuku tucked into Todoroki’s arms, before Todoroki pulls back, gently releasing Izuku. Izuku steps away, glancing up at Todoroki. His friend is watching his face with a fond look, and Izuku smiles up at him.

“Thanks, Todoroki,” he says, and Todoroki smiles, his eyes moving to the side.

“You don’t need to thank me for something as simple as that,” Todoroki says, turning to walk down the hall. “I think our classmates have moved onto the girls’ rooms, from the looks of it.” He gestures to the hall that joins the two wings of the building, and Izuku tips his head, listening. Sure enough, he can hear laughter filtering down the hallway.

“We should probably catch up, then,” Izuku says, and Todoroki nods. Together, they walk quickly, joining their friends once again.

--

By the time they’re all gathered in the kitchen, Izuku is exhausted. Fatigue weighs him down, makes him feel weak and unsteady even though he’s sitting on the couch, the soft fabric beneath him warm from his body heat. He’s resting on the edge seat of one of the couches that faces toward the kitchen, and he can see Kacchan and Kirishima arguing as they cook. Tsuyu sits next to him, Uraraka on her other side. Izuku isn’t entirely sure what happened, but a few minutes ago, the two of them and the group that went to rescue Kacchan all went outside. Izuku had tried to follow, but Uraraka had just shook her head, and Izuku hung back. *I kind of want to ask what happened, though... I just hope everyone’s okay.*

Izuku turns to Tsuyu, remembering that she’d been feeling poorly earlier in the day. “Oh, Tsuyu,” he says, and she turns to look at him, tipping her head slightly. “Are you feeling any better?” She smiles slightly, nodding.

“I am, ribbit,” Tsuyu glances to Uraraka, who nods, giving her a thumbs up. “I was upset about some things, but I spoke with the group that went to save Bakugou, and I’m feeling a lot better.” She tips her head to the side raising a thoughtful finger to her lip. “How about you, Midoriya? You look tired.” Izuku blinks.

“O-Oh, do I?” he responds, shrugging and glancing to the ground. “It’s just been a long day, you know, with the moving in and stuff.”

“Hmm,” Tsuyu hums. “Well, if that’s the case, make sure you rest well tonight.” Izuku glances up at her, and from the look on her and Uraraka’s face, both heavy with concern, they both know full well that it’s not it. Izuku’s grateful that they’re not pressing him on it.

“Mhm!” Uraraka hums in agreement. “You should take a hot shower and eat something sweet, then go to bed early,” she says, clapping her hands together. “That’s what I do when I’m tired, and it usually works pretty well!” She gives him a bright smile, and Izuku returns it, even if there’s a deep, heavy fatigue settling over him. He’s been tired like this a lot, lately. *It could be from using my quirk every day, he thinks, but if that’s the case, it’ll get better as I practice more often, won’t it?*

“Hey, Midoriya,” Ashido says, and Izuku glances up, blinking. “Someone’s here to see you.” She’s standing at the door, holding it open, a surprised expression on her face. Izuku tips his head, trying to see past her, but it doesn’t matter. He blinks in surprise as Monoma, wearing a loose white t-shirt

and well fitted jeans, walks into the room, his hands in his pockets and a lazy smirk on his face.

“Miss me?” Monoma says as he steps inside, flipping his hair out of his eyes. Izuku blinks, standing up.

“Monoma!” Izuku says, surprised. “What are you doing here?” Izuku starts walking over to him, his bare feet sinking into the soft carpet. Monoma walks over to him as Ashido shuts the door. Izuku can see all of 1-A watching the two of them.

“I came to visit you, of course. Didn’t she just say that?” Monoma says, jerking his thumb back in Ashido’s direction. Izuku blinks.

“Y-Yeah, but--” Izuku swallows, tipping his head to the side. He thinks for a moment, the room eerily silent. “Do--do you want to see my room?” Monoma blinks.

“Your room?” he echoes, before his face settles, shifting from surprise to his usual smirk. “Sure,” he says, casting a gaze over the room. “I like being the center of attention in most cases, but this is getting a little uncomfortable. Your room should be just fine.” Izuku nods, relaxing a little, but he hears a voice from the kitchen.

“Oi,” Kacchan says, and when Izuku turns, he’s staring at Monoma with narrowed red eyes. “What do you want with Deku?” He takes a step forward, his arms folded over his chest, on top of his black tank top. Izuku casts a glance to Monoma just in time to see him cock his head to the side, an eyebrow raised.

“What are you, his guard dog?” Monoma sighs lazily, turning away from Kacchan to face Izuku again. “Midoriya’s my friend. Isn’t that enough of a reason for me to pay him a visit?” Izuku swallows, looking back over at Kacchan.

“Fine,” Kacchan says, clicking his tongue and spinning on his heels to face the stove. Izuku watches Kirishima lay a hand on Kacchan’s shoulder, a worried expression on his face as he says something to Kacchan that Izuku can’t quite hear.

“Shall we?” Monoma says, stepping forward. Most of the class is still staring at them, but Izuku nods, swallowing.

“S-Sure,” he answers, and he turns, walking toward the stairs. “I-I’m on the second floor.” He starts onto the stairs, and Monoma hums behind him.

“Oh, interesting. It looks like all of the buildings have identical layouts, then,” he says, glancing around. “Ours is the same.”

“That makes sense!” Izuku says, climbing the stairs two at a time. “They built them all so quickly, after all, and they look the same on the outside, so.” Maybe if he moves quickly enough, he’ll be able to chase some of this exhaustion away.

“Hm, yeah,” Monoma agrees as Izuku steps onto the second floor, glancing back to see Monoma still just behind him. “Did you have any trouble getting your parents to agree to let you come and live here?” He sounds curious, but not too much. Like he’s asking mostly to be polite. Izuku shrugs as he reaches his door, sliding his hand into his pocket and pulling out his keys.

“My mom took some convincing,” he says, “but I talked her into it. She had a bunch of conditions for Aizawa-sensei and the school, though.”

“Makes sense,” Monoma says. “My parents were difficult to convince. They seemed to think that I

was going to do something like Kamino again if they let me stay in the dorm.” He snorts. “I told them I’d be more reckless out of spite if they stopped me, and that seemed to work pretty well.” Izuku slides the key into the lock and turns it, pushing the door to his room open.

“Here we are,” Izuku says, stepping inside and slipping his key back into his pocket. “I-It’s not much, but--”

“Midoriya, we literally live in identical rooms,” Monoma points out, stepping inside. “I’m not going to judge you for your decor.” He pauses, glancing over the room. “Although, you do have a lot of hero merch.” He tugs the door shut behind him, putting his hands on his hips as he keeps looking around. Izuku feels his face flush red under the scrutiny, even though Monoma *had* just said he wasn’t going to judge him.

“S-So, how have you been?” Izuku asks, turning his gaze to the floor. He flexes and unflexes his toes in the fluffy rug.

“I’ve been well,” Monoma says, his voice nonchalant. “Are you recovering alright?” Izuku glances up at him, blinks. Monoma is staring at him with a calm expression on his face, and Izuku takes a deep breath.

“I-I’m fine,” Izuku says. “Why don’t we sit down? You can sit on the desk chair, and I’ll sit on my bed,” he says, and Monoma nods, grabbing the desk chair and sitting down in it backwards so that his chest is leaned against the back of it.

“Killed yourself lately?” Monoma asks, holding his hand up as if examining his nails. Izuku splutters, coughing.

“W-What!?” he asks, shaking his head. “Monoma, you can’t just ask someone that!” Monoma stares back at him, arches an eyebrow.

“But have you?” he asks, dropping his hand so that it’s draped over the back of the chair. He stares at Izuku, face serious.

“D-Does it matter?” Izuku asks, looking to the side. There’s a piece of ripped cardboard in the corner. He’ll need to sweep in here, soon. *Mom told me to pack cleaning supplies...*

Monoma sighs. “Of course it matters, idiot. I’m guessing you have, then,” he says. “Did you have a real reason, like a life or death one, or was it for something stupid, like the sports festival?” Izuku blinks, looking over to him.

“H-How’d you know I used it in the sports festival?” he asks, and Monoma arches an eyebrow at him.

“I rewatched the footage to be sure, but it’s kind of obvious now that I know your quirk. You clearly knew a lot more about each of your opponents than you had any right to.” Monoma shrugs. “Why you’d kill yourself for a school competition is kind of beyond me, but it--”

“Can we not talk about this?” Izuku says, cutting Monoma off. “Like, can we talk about literally anything *but* this?” He swallows. “I don’t want anyone to overhear,” he adds, but it sounds lame even to his ears. Monoma stares back at him, then shrugs.

“Sure,” he says, blue eyes watching Izuku carefully. “We can talk about something else. Have you heard from Kouta at all?” Izuku blinks, watching a slow smile spread across Monoma’s face.

“Kouta? Is he alright?” Izuku asks, and Monoma nods, reaching into his pockets.

“Yeah, he’s doing great,” he says, pulling out a piece of paper and unfolding it. “He’s been writing to both of us, but since you were missing and stuff, I guess they decided to give it all to me.”

Monoma hands the piece of paper to Izuku, and Izuku takes it, staring at the shaky writing. It’s all in kana, and some of the grammar isn’t quite right, but it’s clearly a thank you letter, telling Izuku and Monoma about how they were Kouta’s heroes and how Kouta wanted to be a hero one day so he could be just like them. *Thank you for killing Muscular*, the end of the letter reads. *He really, really needed to die. I am glad he is dead now.* Izuku blinks, looking up at Monoma.

“He wrote this?” Izuku asks, even though he doesn’t doubt it, not after seeing the handwriting and the childish phrasing. Monoma nods, a fond look on his face.

“Yeah,” he says. “I’m glad we saved the little brat. He keeps sending me drawings of Muscular bleeding all over you, but I didn’t think you’d want to see those,” Monoma says, snorting. Izuku grimaces.

“Yeah, no, I think I’m fine...” Izuku says, trailing off and chuckling awkwardly. Monoma sighs, shaking his head.

“Kids,” he says, grinning. “They’re just weird.”

Izuku nods. “Yeah,” he says, although he’s thinking of Mouse and not Kouta. “Did you hear that one of our class got expelled?” he asks, mostly to change the subject, but Monoma lights up.

“Really? One of 1-A finally got punished for their hubris?” Monoma grins wide, chuckling low under his breath. “Finally. This is what I’ve been waiting for,” he says, and Izuku squints at him.

“H-He was kind of a creep to the girls, so...” Izuku grimaces, and Monoma scowls.

“Good fucking riddance, then,” he says, leaning back and crossing his arms over his chest. “What, are you all going to just be down a student for the rest of high school, then? Or do you think they’ll transfer one of the gen-ed kids in?”

Izuku hums under his breath. “Mm, I don’t know,” he tips his head to the side slightly. “I mean, I think that Aizawa-sensei would transfer Shinsou in.” Monoma tips his head slightly, his blonde hair shifting with the movement.

“Shinsou? Purple-haired mind control kid, right?” he asks, and Izuku grimaces, nodding.

“Don’t call him that to his face,” Izuku says. “I think he gets treated pretty badly for his quirk.” He bites at his lower lip, but Monoma just nods, looking thoughtful.

“I should go introduce myself to him at some point,” he says, leaning his elbow on the top edge of the chair and his cheek on the palm of his hand. “Even if he’s going to be 1-A garbage, we’ve both got villain’s quirks, so I’m sure we have plenty in common.” His eyes shift to Izuku. “I wonder how people would have treated you, if you’d known about your quirk from the beginning. It’s powerful, but kind of morbid.”

Izuku blinks. “I-I don’t know,” he replies truthfully. “I mean, i-it’s the kind of quirk people would fight over, you know?” He sighs. “For as much as I hated being quirkless, I... Well. It’s probably for the best I didn’t know until when I found out.”

Monoma nods. “Probably,” he says, then sighs, blue eyes narrowing. “I still wish we could tell Vlad-sensei, though. This whole traitor thing is bad news.”

“I wouldn’t want you to tell him either way,” Izuku says, biting the inside of his cheek. “I mean,

the adults wouldn't--they wouldn't want me using it on purpose."

"They wouldn't want you killing yourself for sport, you mean," Monoma says, then raises a hand before Izuku can protest. "I know, I know, you don't want to talk about it. But," he says, his blue eyes staring into Izuku's. "You know that you can talk to me about it, right? I'm not going to be your therapist or whatever, but I can be your--" Monoma cuts himself off, clenching his jaw shut, and Izuku blinks, swallowing.

"Friend?" he asks hesitantly, his voice small. "W-We can be friends. If that's--If it's okay with you," he adds. Monoma's face freezes and then relaxes, softening.

"Friends," Monoma says, softly, his face shifting into a faint smile. "I can work with that."

--

When Izuku slips out of his dorm room late that night, his head is pounding with a headache and his eyes burn like he's been staring at a screen for hours. He'd slept until about three in the morning, before his alarm went off, but it doesn't seem to have been enough. *Whatever*, Izuku thinks as he tiptoes into the common room, his socked feet making little to no sound on the rug. It's dark and empty down here, and it's simple for Izuku to sneak to the front door and tug it open, leaving his sneakers behind as he shuts the door behind him.

The night is pleasantly cool compared to the heat of the day, cools to the indoor temperature, in fact, and Izuku loves it as he quickly makes his way down the stairs, ducking into the wooded part of campus. It's darker under the trees, darker than it ever is in the city Izuku patrols in, but that's fine. Izuku is only out tonight to see if someone will notice he's gone, after all.

As soon as he's out of sight of the stairs, he pauses, sliding his backpack off of his left shoulder and opening it just enough to pull out a pair of his sneakers. He slides them on quickly, wincing at the way there's already dirt and pine needles stuck to the fabric of his socks. *I'm going to have to clean these off well if I don't want to give myself away.*

He walks between the trees, watching the brown-black bark of the pines, peeling in thin strips. A few of the trees have wounds that ooze golden sap, trickling in fat, crystalline droplets, and Izuku resists the urge to try to pluck a clump of it from the trees. He's touched enough tree sap in his lifetime to know that it's *impossible* to remove from his hands. Instead, he walks deeper into the forest, his backpack sitting heavy on his shoulders.

It's louder than he thought it'd be, even after the summer camp. The sound of bugs chirping and of the leaves rustling fills the air as a breeze ripples through the woods, brushing the tall tops of the pine trees from side to side. Izuku tips his head back to see the glittering stars, spread across the sky like tiny crystal fragments. He takes a deep breath, in and out. *It must be a new moon*, he thinks as he stares at the sky for another moment, searching it for the moon.

Izuku stops in a clearing about two minutes from the dorm building. He's never been here before, but when he sees the clearing, a place where the grass is exposed to the sky and red-orange wildflowers bob their head in the wind, he knows it's what he's been looking for. In the center of the clearing, an old, scarred oak tree stands, the half of it closest to Izuku marred black and broken in a jagged line. As Izuku draws closer, it smells like charcoal, and he can see ash on the ground below. He thinks it must have been hit by lightning.

There's a hollow in the tree, one that dips down, and Izuku only hesitates for a moment before taking out his phone and turning on the flashlight, shining it down into the hollow of the tree. It's empty, thankfully, and Izuku sighs in relief. *I didn't want to put all of my stuff in a squirrel's nest*

or something , he thinks as he shuts off his phone flashlight and slides his phone back into the pocket of his sweats. He sets his backpack down on the thick, plush grass and unzips it. The yellow fabric looks almost grey in the starlight, and the grass and the tree bark look blueish in tone. It's beautiful, in a kind of otherworldly way. Izuku thinks he likes it almost as much as the neon brights of the city at night.

Izuku pulls out a few things--his Ace costume, for one, along with the knives he uses for his vigilante work and an unopened packet of double-edged razors. The boots that took up too much space in his bag come out, too, although after looking over the hollow in the tree, he doesn't think they'll fit. *I'll have to just wear them when I leave my room and hope nobody sees them* , he thinks, frowning as he carefully sets his costume into the hollow. The coal-black of the tree doesn't seem to transfer to the clothes, and Izuku swipes a finger over it. He stares at the skin, clean as ever. He wonders if it's rained, since the tree was burned, how long it's been.

Izuku thinks as he loads the tree with his supplies. He's right that his boots don't fit, so he shoves them back into his backpack. *If I want to die* , he thinks, *I could come here*. He could also bleed out in his room, of course. It wouldn't be as warm and as nice as in the bath, and he'd have to deal with the cold that takes over his body as he gets close to death from blood loss, but maybe he could ask his mom to get him a kotatsu. He could say they keep it cold in the building, maybe.

Izuku could also kill himself in the public bath, but he'd rather not, all things considered. Even if his friends don't remember, he doesn't want to risk somebody seeing him and stopping him. Plus, he still dreams about the horrified look on Todoroki's face, and he *definitely* isn't over the way Monoma looked at him as they both died. No, he'll keep it private, if he can.

He could hang a noose in his closet, keep some towels on the floor in there, and use it for wherever he needs to die. If he can keep the blood from spreading too fast, it should limit the smell, and Izuku's plenty good at dying quietly by now. *I think tonight is proof that I can't go very long without dying* , he thinks, rubbing at his temple with the palm of one hand as he turns, slinging his backpack over his shoulder as he starts to walk back towards the dorm. *I'll just need to practice using my quirk until it doesn't hurt me any more*.

Chapter End Notes

cw: nothing new tbh

[discord!](#)

i hope you all enjoyed!!! this chapter was a lot of fun to write! im excited to get back into the Meat of things though! provisional license exam arc starts next chap :3c

provisional license exam prep, part 1

Chapter Summary

last time: izuku finishes moving into the dorms and hangs out with monoma! he also makes a crime tree

Chapter Notes

HI GAMERS welcome to the next story arc! since this arc is..... complicated, I'm gonna break it up into multiple bits so it doesn't become like 39458304958340598345 parts long. the provisional license exam Prep is first!! i hope you enjoy!!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Izuku clicks and unclicks his pen as he watches the front of the classroom. Aizawa is shuffling around behind his desk, seemingly getting comfortable. The thing is, he's been doing it for the past ten minutes, and even though class isn't *technically* supposed to start yet, it's making Izuku anxious. He clicks and unclicks his pen faster, shifting in his seat, and Aizawa's eyes slide over to him, staring him down. Izuku freezes, staring back at his teacher with wide eyes, but Aizawa just sighs.

"Alright everyone, settle down," he says, leaning forward in his seat to rest his elbows on his desk. "As you know, it's not yet time for the regular second term to start. We're going to be using the rest of summer break for you to earn your provisional licenses." Aizawa pauses, his gaze moving over the class. Izuku can tell that his classmates are buzzing with excitement, but he just kind of feels sick to his stomach. Izuku's been trying not to think about it, but he knows that--well, he's read the laws on it in detail. Izuku isn't sure, but...

"The licensing exam is notoriously difficult," Aizawa continues, scratching the skin under his scar with his pinkie nail. "Having a license gives you the power to use your quirk to intervene in life or death scenarios, so it's natural that they want it to be extremely selective." He sighs. "Only about 5% who take the test pass. So, starting today, you'll each be coming up with at least two of..." Aizawa trails off, his eyes moving meaningful to the door. A heartbeat later, the door is slammed open, revealing Midnight, Ectoplasm, and Cementoss.

"Your very own special moves!" Midnight finishes with a flourish, flipping her long dark hair over her shoulder. The class erupts into cheers and chatter, but Izuku just lets himself sink further into his chair. *Special moves, huh?* It's not like the idea doesn't appeal to him, but...

"Midoriya," Aizawa says, his gaze catching on Izuku's face. "Hang back here for a moment. Everyone else, go to the locker rooms and get dressed. We'll be in Gym Gamma." His eyes don't move from Izuku's face, even as he addresses the entire class, and Izuku hates it.

Izuku just nods, then looks down at the wooden surface of his desk, at his arms resting there. He's wearing his winter uniform, still, and he knows that Aizawa's picked up on that, but Izuku kind of *wishes* that that was what this was about. No, Izuku doesn't think that this is about his... habits. As

his classmates filter out of the floor, talking happily and excitedly about what they're going to do, what they're going to try, Izuku squeezes his hands into fists, digs his nails into the meat of his palms. *What special move could I come up with, without a quirk? There's no point in this exercise for me.*

"Midoriya?" Todoroki's voice startles Izuku out of thought, and he looks up to see Todoroki hovering over his desk, one hand outstretched like he wants to set it over Izuku's clenched fist. He pulls his hand back, setting it down palm first on the desk's surface instead, his fingers less than an inch from Izuku's hand.

"Todoroki? Is everything okay?" Izuku asks, glancing up at him. Todoroki's face is calm.

"Yes. I just wanted to make sure you were alright," Todoroki says, his gaze meeting Izuku's. "You looked upset." Todoroki glances to the side. "Sorry if I'm overstepping," he says, but Izuku blinks, shaking his head.

"N-No, not at all!" Izuku says, raising his hands and smiling at Todoroki. "I'm fine, but thank you for asking. I'm just still waking up is all." He gives Todoroki one of his best smiles, but Todoroki just stares back at him, blinking once.

"If you're sure," he says, his gaze raking over Izuku. Izuku blinks, then nods.

"I-I'm sure," he says, and Todoroki seems to relax ever so slightly.

"I'll see you in the gym, then," Todoroki says, giving Izuku a soft smile before he turns and heads out of the classroom. Izuku takes a deep breath, listening to the sounds of Todoroki's footsteps growing faint as he moves down the hallway. He takes another deep breath before he turns and looks at Aizawa where his teacher is still sitting behind his desk.

"You and Todoroki are getting along well," Aizawa comments, and Izuku nods, hesitantly.

"Y-Yeah, we're friends," he says, and Aizawa nods.

"I can see that." Aizawa sighs, sliding off of his chair and walking around his desk, moving closer to Izuku. "Judging by the look on your face, I'm guessing you already know what this is about." He slides into the desk beside Izuku's, sitting in it sideways so that he's facing him.

"T-The provisional license," Izuku says, then stops. He doesn't want to say it, not if he doesn't have to. Aizawa nods, his face serious.

"I'm sure you're already aware, but there's no need for you to attempt the licensing exam in the first place. The license is specifically aimed at legalizing quirk usage in the field, and since you don't have a quirk to legalize in the first place, you won't have to take the exam at all." Aizawa leans forward, resting his elbows on his knees. "You're welcome to train with the class, then train with Shinsou while they're taking the test, since it wouldn't make sense for you to do nothing until the second term." Aizawa's eyes move over Izuku's face. "But something tells me that's not enough for you, is it?"

Izuku swallows. "I-I want to take the provisional license exam anyway," he says. "I might not *need* it, but it'd be good experience, right?" He gives Aizawa a hopeful smile, watching as his teacher leans back, lifting his elbows from his knees so he's sitting up straight.

"It would be," Aizawa says, "which is why I've already asked the Hero Commission about it, and they were pretty clear in their answer. They don't want a quirkless student taking the spot of a student who needs the license to work." Aizawa's face doesn't move, but Izuku can hear the

irritation in his tone, and it brings something warm to his chest that Aizawa is frustrated, too. *At least I have one person on my side when it comes to this*, he thinks.

“Are the spots that limited?” Izuku asks, voice quiet. Aizawa shakes his head in a small motion, barely moving at all.

“No, not really.” Aizawa stares back at him, unblinking. “Unfortunately, you’re going to have to face a lot of discrimination in your path to becoming a hero,” he says with a sigh, his eyes half lidded. “Nezu and I are working on convincing the Commission, but in the meantime, I’d like you to prepare for the exam alongside your classmates.”

“Do you think I’ll be allowed to take it?” Izuku asks him, biting at his lower lip. Aizawa stares back at him.

“I don’t know,” Aizawa says. “It can’t help to have you prepared, either way. Which brings me to the next topic. Have you thought at all about your special moves?”

Izuku blinks. “I-I, uh, didn’t really think I could *have* special moves,” he says, honestly. Aizawa nods.

“Because you’re quirkless?” he asks, his eyes narrowing. “What kind of a special move do you think I have?” he asks, arching an eyebrow. “What about someone like Nezu, with an intelligence quirk?” Izuku blinks, his mouth opening a tiny bit, but Aizawa continues. “You’re good at analysis. Analyze your other abilities, not your quirklessness. Build yourself a special move based on where your strengths lie.” Aizawa meets his gaze, steady. “Understood?”

Izuku nods, quickly. “Y-Yes sir!” he says. Aizawa stands up from the chair, stretching. Izuku can hear his joints popping as he does.

“Good,” he says, yawning. “Go get dressed, then. I’ll be over in a minute.” He moves a strand of dark hair out of his face, and Izuku nods again, standing up from his chair.

“Thanks, Aizawa-sensei!” he says, turning to head out of the classroom. His head is already spinning, mind full of ideas bouncing around. *Where my strengths lie, huh? I can work with that.*

--

Izuku’s dorm room is quickly becoming his safe place in a way that his bedroom at home never was. It’s not that he *didn’t* feel safe at home--because he did--but there’s something special about this room, where he can lock himself in and shut the curtains and have complete privacy. It’s dark in the room right now, with the sun having set a few hours ago and his lamp on the lowest setting, casting a thin yellow light over the green rug and the edges of his bed but failing to reach most of the room. Izuku’s only been here for three days at this point, but he’s already fallen into an easy routine, gotten comfortable with the space and his classmates. He also hasn’t cut or killed himself in those three days, and he really doesn’t think he can wait any longer.

The funny thing is that tonight, it’s not like Izuku has a specific reason. Nothing went wrong during the day--they just worked on some rescue basics and went over some of the rules for the dorms. Stuff like keeping the space somewhat clean and letting Aizawa know if they were running low on anything. Aizawa’d told them about the new medical staff coming to UA next week, too, but Izuku already knew about that from his mom, so it wasn’t much of a surprise. He’s still waiting for the inevitable announcement about the mandatory therapy his mom had asked Aizawa for, but so far, it hasn’t come up.

Maybe if they'd done something particularly stressful, like work on special moves (Izuku still hasn't come up with any good ideas for his. Lots of bad ideas, though.) or talked about the summer camp in detail (people bring it up, but only in passing. Nobody asks about it seriously), Izuku could understand why he was so upset. But all in all, it'd been a good day, really.

Uraraka had added him to the group chat, which seems to be composed almost entirely of Kacchan's friends sending memes and complaining about schoolwork. Izuku hasn't sent much there, yet, just a message saying hi, but even being included in the first place feels nice. He hadn't really wanted to be in the group chat at first, since he isn't much of a texting person, but it's fun to read through when he's not doing anything else.

Maybe that's it, Izuku thinks to himself. If they had normal classes and homework right now, he'd have less time to think, surely. Less time to be painfully aware of the fact that it's been *so long* since he last got to kill himself, since he last took a blade to his skin. Realistically, Izuku knows he was at the Gekkeiju base for longer, that he's gone much longer without in the past, but these past three days feel like an eternity. The scars on his arms have started to turn from a red color to a silvery one, too, and even though Izuku knows it's because he's only been cutting before resetting and not because he's actually stopped, it brings up an ugly feeling deep in his stomach. Izuku doesn't *like* the scars, but he also really, really doesn't want them to fade. It doesn't make any sense.

So, Izuku is sitting in the dark in his dorm room, an open packet of gauze sitting on his lap, bright white even in the dim light. He's got a razor, one of the thin, bendy kinds you get as refills for really fancy razors, and he's wearing a short sleeved shirt, a plain black one he hasn't worn in months. It smells like his drawers at home. Izuku's skin looks pale in the dim light, the weak yellow glow from his lamp over on his desk. Izuku sets the razor on his skin of his upper arm, draws a thin red line.

How many times did he even die, at the summer camp and the Gekkeiju base? Izuku doesn't even know. He watches blood bead in the cut, watches it threaten to run down his arm and onto his bedspread or his shorts. He mops up the blood with the gauze, then takes a breath. *That one's for when Monoma and I left the first time, when we died together.* He swipes another cut, this one deeper. *That's for when it was just me, when my chest was destroyed.* Izuku cuts again, his skin unzipping easily to show something white and uneven underneath. *When I died the first time, at the Gekkeiju base, from Manami.* Two more little ones, then a big one, deep and bloody and longer than he'd usually make. *Sasaki killed me twice, and I died to Mouse once.*

Izuku stares down at his arm. The red blood looks nearly black in the dim light as it runs down his skin, sticky and iron-scented, but Izuku feels better. Clean, empty. He presses the gauze to the six cuts on his upper arm. *Six cuts, for six deaths.*

Izuku leans back until his head knocks against the wall behind him, not loud enough to wake anyone else up, but enough of an impact that Izuku can feel it. His back is pressed into his bed, his arms sort of crossed over his chest as he puts pressure on his cuts so they'll stop bleeding. They sting, but the pain feels more cold, like an ice cube pressed onto his skin. Izuku holds on to that feeling, lets it sink into his bones. *This weekend, I'll get my closet set up to die*, he thinks to himself. *That way, I won't have to do it this way again.*

Izuku curls into the corner where his bed meets the wall and presses his razor into his neck, slicing quickly. The blade cuts easily through his skin, and just like the many nights before this, he feels that dizzying pull, tugging him backward, into something dark.

It's a rainy, humid afternoon that finds Izuku standing in the field between Gym Gamma and the woods. Izuku's in his sports uniform, the long sleeved one, even though he supposes Aizawa already knows about his arms. He doesn't want Shinsou to see, either way, so he doesn't have much of a choice. The light rain that drizzles softly from the grey sky makes the fabric stick to his skin, though, and it annoys Izuku. *At least I don't leave open cuts any more*, he thinks to himself. *They'd definitely start leaking blood again with my shirt all wet like this, and that'd be hard to explain.* Especially considering that Aizawa hasn't shown up yet, so it's just him and Shinsou on the field.

"Hey, Shinsou!" Izuku says, giving the boy a smile. Shinsou stares back at him, seemingly unimpressed. "Long time no see!"

"Yeah," Shinsou says, turning his gaze away from Izuku, looking out at the forest. "It has been." Izuku takes a small breath, pushing down the anxiety. *Shinsou's just like this. It's not that he doesn't want to talk to me.*

"How have you been?" Izuku asks, and Shinsou shrugs.

"Same as ever," he replies, resting one hand on his hip. "Is Aizawa going to show up, or did he forget about us?" Shinsou asks, sounding annoyed. "I have stuff to do."

Izuku blinks. "I-I'm sure he's on his way," he says. "What do you have to do?" Izuku asks, swallowing as Shinsou glances over at him, one eyebrow raised "I-I mean, you don't have to tell me, I'm just wondering," Izuku continues, and Shinsou sighs. The bags under his eyes look darker than normal.

"If I can get my provisional license, they're supposedly moving me into the hero course second term," Shinsou says, bitterness in his voice. "It's got an abysmal pass rate, and I don't have any of the training you hero course kids have for it, though, so it's not like I stand a chance." He snorts under his breath, a dark look on his face. "It's just a way of pretending that they're really considering moving me up, to make Aizawa stop complaining about it."

"At least they're letting you take it," Izuku mutters, and Shinsou's head snaps over to look at him. Izuku feels his face flush red, and he swallows, wishing he hadn't blurted that out.

"They aren't even letting you take it?" Shinsou asks. "Why the hell not?" He looks offended, more than surprised.

Izuku sighs, kicking at the ground. "I'm quirkless, so they don't want me using up a spot for someone who might actually need the license," he says. The ground is so soft that his shoe tears a clump of grass right out, exposing dark, damp earth. "Technically I don't need the license, but it's not like I could get a work-study or a job without one, so." He swallows. "I guess it's just how they're going to keep the quirkless kid from becoming a hero."

Shinsou huffs. "As if Aizawa will let them get away with that," he says, and Izuku looks up to see him staring back at Izuku with an unimpressed look. "They'll have to let you take it, but they might not pass you," he says. "That's what they're going to do with me, I'm sure."

"Because of your quirk?" Izuku asks, and Shinsou nods.

"Why else?" he says, then turns his head slightly. "He's here." Izuku blinks, following Shinsou's gaze to see Aizawa approaching them, capture scarf wound around his neck on top of a black fitted t-shirt and a pair of long pants. Behind him, three students follow, all three wearing sports uniforms.

One of them walks ahead of the other two, a thin girl with short, dark hair that curls around her ears, and her dark crimson eyes watch Izuku, a smirk on her face. She glances back at the other two, who are nearly identical as they walk side by side. Both of them have fine, light grey hair that matches the fur that covers their cat ears and tan, smooth skin and whiskers that sprout from the skin near their mouths, but one of them is wearing her shoulder length hair down in a neat bob. The other has his hair tied back in a low ponytail, and Izuku can see that his hair is longer than his sister's (or so Izuku assumes), reaching almost to his hips. Aside from their hair and their genders, the only difference Izuku can see is that the girl has bright, neon pink eyes, while her brother's are a deep, dark blue. Izuku sees tails swishing behind each of them.

"Oi, 'Zawa," the first girl, with the dark hair and the red eyes says, raising an eyebrow. "These look too young to be first years." Her gaze rakes over Izuku, cold and judgemental. Izuku feels a shiver run up his spine.

"Aw, don't be mean!" the catgirl says, putting a hand on the other girl's shoulder. "It looks like we kept them waiting out in the rain. We should at least be nice! Plus, aren't you their age?" She tips her head to the side slightly, grinning just wide enough to show that her teeth are like a cat's, too.

"They're first years," Aizawa says, sighing and shutting his eyes for just a moment before opening them again. "Shinsou, Midoriya, these three," he jerks a thumb back to point at them, "are second years. I taught Maka and Ema." He drops his hand, sliding it into his pocket. "They're going to help you with training. If you just spar against each other and me all the time, you're going to grow accustomed to fighting the same people. They've each got their own skill set, too, so it'll be a good experience for you." As soon as Aizawa finishes speaking, the girl with the cat ears steps forward, standing beside the red-eyed girl, and she bows, folding over at the waist.

"Ema Kojima! It's a pleasure to meet the both of you!" She straightens up, giving them a wide grin and a peace sign. "Just call me Ema, though. It'll get confusing otherwise! Oh, and my hero name is Neon!" Izuku blinks, then returns the smile.

"I-I'm Izuku Midoriya," he says, "and my hero name is Deku!" He bows to her, ever so slightly, and she nods quickly, bouncing on the balls of her feet.

"Deku! That's so cute, I love it," Ema says, nodding. Her gaze shifts to Shinsou, and he narrows his eyes ever so slightly.

"Hitoshi Shinsou," he says. "I don't have a hero name yet."

"Because you're not in the heroics course, right?" the other girl says, arching an eyebrow. "Seems shortsighted to me."

"Seems like it's none of your business," Shinsou drawls back at her, glaring. She just shrugs.

"Maybe. I'm Maka Ishida, although if you call me Ishida, I'll make you regret it." Maka folds her arms over her chest, tipping her head back to stare down at Shinsou even though she's the same height as him. "It's either Maka or Mars to you."

"Like the planet?" Izuku asks, tipping his head to the side. Maka looks to him, eyes narrowing in a glare.

"No," she says, "like the Roman god of war. Did you fail history?" She rolls her eyes, the movement exaggerated, and even though Izuku knows plenty of people who act that way, there's something about her that sends a shiver down his spine. Izuku takes a small step back, ignoring the way Shinsou looks at him out of the corner of his eyes.

“Um,” the last student says, stepping to the side so he’s no longer behind Maka and Ema. “I’m Haruta. I’m in general studies, class 2-D.” Haruta tips his head down in a slight bow, his eyes trained on the ground. “Nice to meet you, Shinsou, Midoriya.”

Aizawa clears his throat. “Now that you’re all acquainted,” he says, straightening his scarf with one hand, “I’ll leave you two it. By the time I come back in two hours, I want you two,” he points at Shinsou and Midoriya, “to be able to tell me why I’d have you train with these three. Other than that, I don’t really care what you do.”

“Hmph,” Maka hums, tilting her head to the side. “So I can do whatever I want?”

“No,” Aizawa says quickly. “You can’t. If I come back and anyone is seriously injured, I’ll speak with your homeroom teacher and get you detention for the rest of your life. Is that clear?” he asks, turning to face Maka. She rolls her eyes.

“Crystal,” she says, puffing out her cheeks. “You know I’d never hurt children, Aizawa.”

“Aizawa- *sensei*,” Aizawa corrects, raising an eyebrow at her. Maka shrugs.

“You’re not my teacher anymore,” she says, a slight grin on her face. Aizawa grunts, sounding annoyed, but he just turns and starts to walk away from the five of them.

“Two hours,” he calls as he leaves, and Izuku stares after him for a moment before turning his gaze to look at the second years. Ema is watching him and Shinsou, her hands folded behind her back and a curious look on her face. Haruta is still hanging back, staring at the ground, and Maka turns to look at them, something dark gleaming in her eyes.

“Alright, then,” she says. “I’m going into the gym. It’s nasty out here,” Maka gestures at the rain, then turns on her heels and starts off toward the gym’s side door. Izuku blinks, stepping forward when Ema starts to follow after her. As they walk through the wet grass and step up onto the concrete sidewalk, Ema turns back to look at him, her cat ears twitching.

“He didn’t tell you two why we’re here, did he?” she asks, smiling. “We had an assignment to find kids to tutor, and Maka-chan insisted that we teach sensei’s new class! Our teacher thought it was totally hilarious, so he let us get away with it, even though it was supposed to be like, actual kids.” she giggles, her eyes shutting with the width of her smile. “Like, elementary schoolers! But inside of babysitting, we’re gonna show you two some neat stuff, so we really got the best deal possible, I think.”

Izuku blinks. “This is for a school assignment?” he asks, and Ema nods.

“Mhmm! Technically it’s just me and Maka-chan, but Haruta and I do pretty much everything together, so he’s here of course.” She puts a hand up to her mouth and stage whispers conspiratorially. “We’re twins, you know.”

Shinsou snorts. “Wow, really?” he says, rolling his eyes.

“Ema, stop looking backwards,” Maka snaps as she pulls the door to the gym open. “You’re going to run into something.”

“I can tell where I’m going!” Ema protests, but she turns her head to face forward, anyway. She and Maka disappear into the gym, and as Haruta follows them, Izuku swallows, casting a glance at Shinsou. Shinsou returns the look.

“Aizawa really left us with the weird ones, didn’t he?” Shinsou remarks, his tone dry. Izuku nods,

biting at his lip. The air smells strange, like something sweet but also not at all. Izuku isn't sure if he likes it or not.

"Yeah," Izuku answers, voice almost a whisper as he steps into the gym. It's about as bright inside as out, maybe even more so with the bright lights, but the lighting is warmer, more yellow. Izuku blinks, feeling something strange take hold in his chest. He thinks he can smell baking bread for a moment, but then it smells like rotting meat, and then nothing. He narrows his eyes, glancing around the room.

"Does..." he swallows, feeling his heartbeat pick up. "Is one of you using a quirk?" Izuku asks, looking at the three third years. They all turn back to look at him, Ema and Haruta with curious expressions. Maka's eyes widen slightly, and she tips her head to the side.

"Oh, you noticed really fast," she says. "I didn't think you were that smart, to be honest." Izuku blinks as she turns to face him completely, folding her arms over her chest. "My quirk can't be turned off, so yeah, I'm using it." She arches an eyebrow. "Try and guess what you think it does."

Izuku blinks. "I-It's releasing a smell," he starts, speaking slowly as he thinks. "So it's probably something like Midnight-sensei's, right? But I'm not feeling sleepy, just... uneasy." Izuku bites at his lower lip. "Is that what it does?"

Maka nods. "Pretty much. I'll let you experience most of it yourself, but my quirk is called Pheromones. My sweat contains pheromones that make most people feel intimidated or afraid. The exact effect varies by who smells it, though." She glances over to Ema, who snickers, then giggles. "Shut up, Em."

Ema shrugs, still laughing under her breath. "It's really funny, though!" she whines, grinning. She glances to Izuku and Shinsou. "Maka-chan's quirk tends to effect people with mutation type quirks way differently than it would normal people. To me and Haruta she smells really, really nice!"

"That's one way to put it," Haruta mumbles, his face coloring a slight red. Maka reaches a hand out and swats the tips of Ema's ears.

"What part of 'shut up' was confusing to you?" Maka asks, rolling her eyes. "Let's stop talking about me and start hitting each other or something." Ema nods, then turns to Izuku and Shinsou.

"How do you guys wanna do this? Should we pair off?" she tips her head back at her brother. "Haruta doesn't fight much, so he could sit out. He's aiming to be a medic." Izuku blinks, then glances at Shinsou.

"Does that--" he starts, but Maka cuts him off.

"Let's do two versus two," she says, eyeing him. "I wanna see how they work together." She takes a step toward them, cracking her knuckles. "No weapons, though. And no teeth. I've seen footage of you, knife boy. I'm not interested in bleeding, thanks."

Izuku blinks. "K-Knife boy?" he echoes, and Shinsou sighs beside him. Izuku looks over to see him rolling his eyes.

"Can we just get started?" he asks, his half lidded eyes resting on Maka. "I really don't care about your life stories or whatever." Izuku watches as Maka raises an eyebrow, then grins, slow and sure. Her teeth gleam white in the light.

Izuku expects Maka to say something, to reply to Shinsou, but instead, Izuku blinks and she isn't there any more. She's between Izuku and Shinsou, her hands in half-closed fists as she twists,

throwing a punch that Shinsou doesn't even seem to see coming. It connects with the side of his ribcage, and Shinsou steps back with a grunt. Maka takes a step away from him, backing into Izuku, and Izuku feels his heart jump into his throat, adrenaline filling him as he breathes in the air coming off of her.

“Sorry, guys,” she says. “Zawa told us about your quirks in advance. I’m not going to fall for something that easy.” She turns, throwing an elbow strike at Izuku, and Izuku knows he has to dodge or block, but the way his head is filled with thick fear, with a primal sense of *danger* makes it hard for him to move. His hands are shaking when he gets them up to block, and it’s a lot weaker than usual. He manages to shove her elbow out of the way, but she doesn’t seem fazed.

“I guess we’re getting started, then,” Shinsou says, and Izuku’s trained with him enough to know to step back. Shinsou throws a quick kick aimed at Maka’s head, but she ducks below it easily.

“Ema!” she calls, tipping her head back. “I’m bored.”

“Should I fight on their side, then?” Ema asks, laughter in her voice. “Wouldn’t that be kind of unfair?”

Maka rolls her eyes, and Izuku takes the opportunity to slide in, sweeping at her legs and throwing an open-palm strike at the center of her chest. Maka blocks the palm strike easily, but Izuku gets her legs, knocking her feet out from under her and sending her to the ground. She lands on her ass, blinking up at Izuku. Her eyes narrow.

“Oh, no,” she says, a grin growing on her face. “You’re going to keep count of our points. A body hit is one, head hit is two, bringing them to the ground is three.” She hops to her feet, slipping into a fighting stance that looks too much like Aizawa’s to be a coincidence. “This is going to be a lot of fun,” she says, and Izuku swallows.

“So that’s three points for me and Shinsou?” he asks, and Maka looks over to him, eyes half lidded.

“Sure,” she agrees, nodding. “You’d better savor your lead. It won’t last long,” she says as she slides forward, throwing a series of kicks at Izuku. Izuku bites at his lip as he dodges out of the way of them, moving to the side and forward.

This is going to be interesting, he thinks as he makes eye contact with Shinsou across the room. From the look on Shinsou’s face, he agrees.

Chapter End Notes

cw: graphic self harm

[discord!](#)

i may be adding more ocs. but i PROMISE i have a reason. i swear. it's not just that i love ocs. it's definitely a little bit of that but that's not the only reason

thank you for all the support!!!! also, thank you all for your kind words about my safety and stuff!! i know i mentioned a bonus chap/oneshot but idk if that's in the cards in the next few days just bc im gonna have to get back to college and stuff and clean

my dorm and all that. i really appreciate the patience!!! you all are so nice to me <3

provisional license exam prep, part 2

Chapter Summary

last time: izuku starts provisional license exam prep, learns he isn't allowed to take the exam, and meets ema, haruta, and maka, three 2nd years

Chapter Notes

hi gamers here's an extra long chapter that i think sucks major balls but i don't want to look at it any more

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Izuku tries to catch his breath, the foam mat feeling cool underneath him as he lies face-up on the floor, staring up at the ceiling. His face is covered in fast-cooling sweat as he gasps for air, and beside him, Shinsou is in much the same condition. The room is filled with a thick scent of something like baking bread or rotting meat, and Izuku feels his body fill with adrenaline each time he breathes in, even though Maka is across the gym from them, lying on the floor in much the same condition. Ema is standing next to her, and Izuku hears her giggle before she leans over Maka.

“You guys are all worn out already, and it hasn’t been two hours!” Ema says, nudging Maka with her foot. “I thought you told me before that you were gonna try and avoid getting sweaty?”

“Shut... up.” Maka gasps out, and Izuku can see her swat Ema’s leg. “They’re handling it just fine.”

“After a certain point, it just feels like I had too much caffeine,” Shinsou remarks from beside Izuku, and Izuku turns his head to see Shinsou looking at him.

“Really?” Izuku asks, still catching his breath. “For me it...it still feels kind of...”

“Scary?” Maka finishes for him as he trails off. “Olfactory fatigue helps some, but unfortunately there’s not much I can do short of taking a shower. Sounds like Shinsou’s one of the lucky ones who doesn’t have as much of a reaction.” She huffs out a breath. “Still, you two stay over there. I really don’t want to have to deal with you crying or something like that.” She waves a hand that Izuku can see from his position on the floor, but Izuku wouldn’t be moving closer on his own, anyway. After getting used to it, her quirk isn’t *too* bad, but feeling on edge and full of adrenaline all the time, like he’s being watched or like his brain thinks there’s a gun pointed at him, is kind of unpleasant all the same.

“What are we gonna do for the next...” Ema glances up, and Izuku follows her gaze to see the clock. “Forty five minutes?” she finishes, sighing.

“Hm,” Maka hums, still on the floor. “You two are preparing for your provisional license exams, right?”

“Y-Yeah,” Izuku answers. He swallows, then pulls himself up, into a sitting position. Beside him, Shinsou does the same.

“Well,” Ema says, smiling at them, “Maka-chan’s the perfect person to give you advice, then!” Ema giggles. “She failed it twice before she finally got hers!” Maka makes a choking sound, shooting up into a sitting position, and Izuku watches her swat at Ema’s leg, her face going bright red.

“Ema!” she says, voice high pitched. “Don’t tell them that, what the fuck!” Izuku blinks as Ema shrugs, nudging the outside of Maka’s thigh with her foot.

“What? It’s true, isn’t it?” Ema says, shrugging. “You should tell them about it.” She glances across the room, to where Haruta is sitting on a bench and playing on his phone. “Right, Haru?”

Haruta glances up, blinking. “Oh, um.” He swallows. “Yeah. Sure.”

Maka snorts. “He wasn’t even listening,” she says, rolling her eyes. Her gaze settles on Izuku and Shinsou. “Fine.” she sighs, pulling her knees up and draping one arm over them. “Yeah, I failed twice. My quirk is ‘poorly suited,’” she makes air quotes with one hand, “to rescue missions.” She sighs. “I’m sure you can see why.”

Izuku blinks. “Poorly suited?” he says, tipping his head to the side. “They turned you down because of your quirk?” It doesn’t surprise Izuku, but he hadn’t thought of it himself. It makes sense, though; he can’t imagine that a scared civilian would react well to the effects of Maka’s quirk.

“Her attitude probably didn’t help,” Shinsou mutters beside Izuku, barely audible. Izuku sees Ema’s ears twitch though, and she rolls her eyes, a smile on her face.

“Maka-chan can be nice when she wants to be, you know,” Ema says. Maka glances up at her.

“Wait, what did he say?” she asks, narrowing her eyes. Ema shrugs.

“That’s my quirk, by the way,” Ema says, turning to look at Izuku and Shinsou again. “Wild Senses! All of my five senses are a lot stronger than most people’s.” She gives them both a bright smile. “I’m pretty sure if I wasn’t a mutant type too, I’d be terrified of Maka-chan!”

Shinsou tips his head to the side, arching an eyebrow. “Aizawa said that none of you had quirks that help with combat,” he says. Izuku blinks, then nods.

“Wouldn’t enhanced senses help a lot with fighting?” Izuku asks, and Ema nods, her bright pink eyes gleaming.

“They do!” Ema answers, licking her bottom lip. “Now that I know how to use them, anyway. Before UA and Aizawa-sensei, I was pretty much useless in a fight.” She laughs, rubbing the back of her head with one hand. “All my quirk did for me was overwhelm and distract me the second things got loud or bright or complicated. I only passed the entrance exam because of the rescue points!” She gives them an embarrassed smile.

“What’s Haruta-senpai’s quirk, then?” Izuku asks before he can talk himself out of it. “If you two were identical twins, it’d have to be the same, but you’re not, so--”

“We are,” Haruta says, and Izuku blinks, looking over at him. “I’m trans.” Haruta shrugs, biting at his lower lip. “And our quirks are different.” Izuku watches as he twists his hands together in his lap, looking to the side with deep blue eyes.

“Your eyes are different colors,” Shinsou points out. “You can’t be identical.”

Ema laughs. “Oh, these are colored contacts!” she says, pointing at her eyes. “I don’t think *anyone* naturally has neon pink eyes.” Izuku wonders about that. He’s certainly seen neon *green*. Haruta’s head whips around to look at Izuku, and he blinks, quickly, frowning. Izuku stares back at him, feeling vaguely unsettled.

“Quirks are influenced by environment, too, not just genetics,” Maka says, yawning. “Jeez, have you guys not had *any* biology classes yet?”

“We actually haven’t,” Izuku says, absentmindedly. “What’s your quirk, Haruta-senpai?” Haruta stares back at him, lips pressing into a thin line.

“Wild Empathy,” he replies, glancing away from Izuku, at the ground. “I can sense the thoughts and emotions of people close by.” Izuku blinks.

Shinsou snorts. “Mind reading, huh?” Haruta shrugs, crossing his arms over his chest. Izuku watches him, feeling his heart pound with fear that isn’t from Maka’s quirk.

“Not exactly, but yeah.” He sighs, blowing out a breath of air. “I can’t turn it off, but I can redirect it. I usually just focus on Ema’s thoughts so that all I get from other people is any really strong emotions.” His gaze moves over to Izuku just as Izuku swallows down the anxiety rising in his throat.

“They’re essentially the same quirk,” Maka says, wiping some of the sweat off of her forehead with the back of her arm. “Just different editions. While my quirk is cool and unique and has absolutely zero downsides,” she says, completely deadpan.

“What did you use for your special move?” Izuku asks, forcing himself to think only about the provisional license exam. *I can’t think about this now. Not with someone who can read minds here.* He focuses on Maka’s quirk. She could use something similar to Kacchan’s gauntlets to build up sweat, but he isn’t sure how useful that would be. Izuku can’t think about Haruta’s quirk. He needs to stay focused on the conversation.

Maka glances over to him, crimson eyes half-lidded. “What would you do, if you had my quirk?” she asks, unwrapping her arm from her knees and moving it behind her, leaning on it. Izuku blinks, thinking.

“You could... use your sweat to temporarily incapacitate someone, right?” Izuku asks, and Maka nods.

“Yeah,” she says. “That was my first idea, too. The problem is, not everybody responds to my pheromones the same way. Against someone like her,” Maka gestures to Ema, who gives Izuku a peace sign and a wink, “it’d be completely useless. It also doesn’t incapacitate people who are used to working with a lot of fear, or who are resistant to it for some reason.” She meets Izuku’s gaze. “Try again.”

Izuku blinks, biting at his lower lip. “Um...” he trails off, glancing to Shinsou, who shrugs. “Do you use any weapons?” he asks, remembering his knives and Shinsou’s capture scarf. Maka’s lips quirk up in a small smirk.

“I do,” she says, tipping her head to the side slightly. “I use brass knuckles and a staff in real fights.” Her narrowed eyes watch him from behind long, dark eyelashes. “Keep going.”

Izuku swallows. “P-People fight worse, when they have an adrenaline rush,” he says, and Maka

nods as he speaks. “It makes you stronger, but shakier and less controlled. So, you could use that to your advantage, right?”

“Right,” Maka says. “My quirk is also generally a little disorienting. So, one of my special moves works with that.” She takes a deep breath, then hops to her feet, rolling her shoulders. “Ema,” she says, turning to face Ema and taking a step back into a fighting stance. Ema perks up, then mirrors her, moving into her own fighting position.

“Ema is basically immune to my quirk, so this isn’t a great demonstration, but it’s something,” Maka says, stepping forward and throwing a neat punch at Ema. Ema blocks it easily, pushing it aside with her forearm and stepping back to maintain their distance. Izuku can tell from the way they move that they’ve fought together countless times.

“I fight at a little bit slower of a speed than I normally would, first,” Maka says, sliding back and then turning and twisting to throw a back kick. Ema dodges to the side, only for Maka to use her momentum to throw a punch that taps Ema on the shoulder.

“Then, I do this,” Maka says, and she tugs at the collar of her sports uniform, pulling it away from her skin. Even at this distance, Izuku can feel the wave of her quirk washing over him, spreading dread through his body and making his hair stand on end. “My sports uniform is modified so that I don’t gas the entire class every time we work out, and my costume has a similar function so I don’t spook civilians nearly as bad. I can use that to release more of my quirk all at once, too.”

She jerks forward, spinning on her heels and throwing an elbow strike at Ema, moving far faster than she had before. Izuku watches Ema dodge, leaning out of the way of the hit, but only just barely. He sees a faint blush on her cheeks, under her whiskers, and he wonders what that’s about as Maka throws two kicks, one waist high and one at Ema’s head in quick succession, faster than when she’d been fighting Izuku and Shinsou.

“And then,” she says, sliding back, “I do that. If I push, I can fight a little faster than usual for a few seconds, and since I’d just been going slow on purpose and my quirk is stronger, most people get scared and jump to their own conclusions.” She turns, putting her hands on her hips and looking at Izuku and Shinsou. “My quirk makes people perceive me as a threat, so I use that to my advantage, but the actual special move is really just me tricking people into thinking I’d suddenly gotten faster. I called it ‘disorienting strike,’ but I don’t plan on being the type of hero who shouts the names of their moves, really,” she says, grinning and looking down at them.

“So, Midoriya, Shinsou,” she says, tipping her head to the side, her bangs falling over her left eye. “Got any ideas for your special moves?”

Izuku blinks, glancing over at Shinsou. Shinsou stares back at him, then shrugs, sighing.

“To be honest,” Shinsou says. “I hadn’t really thought of anything beyond just brainwashing my opponent.” He leans forward, crossing his legs so he’s sitting criss-cross. “I’m not in the heroics course, so I haven’t been in the class on making a special move, either.”

Maka huffs, rolling her eyes. “I already told you that was shortsighted, didn’t I?” She starts to take a step forward, then freezes, putting her foot back where it was. “Ugh. I’m still all sweaty,” she says, glancing down at herself. “Whatever. You seem to think you’re real smart, right?” she asks, looking back at Shinsou with a brow quirked up. “Use that big brain of yours and come up with something beyond the obvious for a change.”

Izuku swallows, glancing over to see a scowl on Shinsou’s face as the other boy rolls his eyes, getting to his feet and brushing off the front of his uniform. Shinsou folds his arms over his chest,

tilting his head to the side slightly and staring Maka down.

“You don’t know anything about me,” Shinsou says. “So do us both a favor and stop pretending you do.” His eyes narrow, and Izuku clenches his jaw, pulling himself up and standing beside Shinsou. The other boy is taller than him even without his poofy hair, and Izuku has to look up slightly at him.

“M-Maybe we should calm down,” he says, raising his hands in a placating gesture. Shinsou’s eyes flick over to him, disdain and annoyance in his gaze. Izuku can feel Maka’s gaze on him too, and he swallows, wondering if he’d be anxious in this situation normally, or if it’s Maka’s quirk.

“I agree,” Ema says, taking a step forward. Izuku glances over to see her set a hand on Maka’s shoulder. “We can do this a different way!” She looks at Izuku and Shinsou, smiles. “I think that there’s two things you have to do to make a good special move, really.”

Izuku blinks. “W-What are they?” he asks, grateful for the diversion from the weird angry staring contest Shinsou and Maka seem to have going. Ema looks at him completely and holds up two fingers.

“Well the first is to cover for your weaknesses,” she says, putting one finger down, “and the other is to enhance your strengths!” she says, closing her hand into a fist and smiling. “For me when I got my license, my quirk was still a weakness in battle, not a strength. So, I got the support team to make me something that would help me with that!” Ema grins, reaching towards her waist, then pausing. “Oh, I forgot I’m in my sports uniform, not my costume, but it’s a smoke bomb,” she says, rubbing the back of her head. “If I’m blinded, I can still fight, and I don’t get as overwhelmed by all of the movement and stuff. But it puts my opponent at a disadvantage, so it turns my weakness into a strength *and* it makes it so other people are weaker!”

“Which is what you need to be doing,” Maka says, and Izuku looks over to her. She has a scowl on her face, but there isn’t the same heat to her voice as usual. “Both of you have strengths and weaknesses. Everybody does. Every single hero-in-training has something special about them that they can turn into a move.” She sighs, turning so her back is facing them, walking away, but she looks back over her shoulder. “You two are smart, and your weaknesses are obvious. People are going to underestimate you.” she grins, wide and wicked. “Use their stupidity to your advantage, and crush them.” She turns her head away from them and keeps walking, her arms folded over her chest, and Izuku stares at her, blinking. Ema seems equally confused, turning and staring at her.

“Hey, Maka-chan!” Ema says, frowning. “Where are you going? It hasn’t been two hours yet.” She reaches out, setting a hand on Maka’s shoulder, but Maka brushes it off with pale fingers.

“I’m going to shower,” she says. “I’m disgusting, and my quirk is *everywhere* . I’m pretty sure you and Haruta can handle babysitting for them for the next half hour or whatever.” She casts a glance back over her shoulder as she opens the door to the locker rooms attached to the gym, red eyes shining in the light. Izuku blinks as the door shuts behind her, making a loud noise that echoes in the gym.

Ema sighs. “Well, there she goes,” she says, taking a few steps away from the door and closer to where Izuku and Shinsou are standing. Across the gym, Izuku sees Haruta set his phone face down on the bench and uncross his legs, getting to his feet and stretching with his hands above his head. Izuku kind of doesn’t want him participating in the conversation, but he tamps down that thought quickly. *He can probably sense that*, he thinks to himself. *I can’t be rude. It’s not his fault I have secrets* . Izuku bites his lip and forcibly redirects himself to thinking about the shape and size of the foam tiles that make up the flooring here.

“Aizawa-sensei should be here soon, anyway,” Ema says with a sigh, stopping a few feet away from Izuku and Shinsou. Haruta joins her, nodding.

“I don’t think he actually intended to leave us for the full two hours,” he says, his arms folded over his chest like he’s cold, then glances over to Izuku, biting at his lower lip. “I-I can leave, if I’m making you uncomfortable,” he says, and Izuku blinks.

“O-Oh, no, i-it’s fine!” Izuku says, shaking his head. “It’s not--you’re fine, really!” He swallows, squeezing his hands into fists. Even with Maka’s scent fading from the room, he still feels uneasy.

“You can’t turn it off at all?” Shinsou asks, and when Izuku turns to look at him, he’s watching Haruta with his usual tired expression. “I bet *that* made you real popular in middle school,” he scoffs, and when Izuku glances back at Haruta, he can tell Shinsou’s right on the mark by the way the older boy is grimacing and staring down at the ground, his arms tightening around himself.

“I suppose you’d know,” Haruta replies softly, and there’s no heat in his voice. “After all, society isn’t very fond of quirks that involve the mind.” He stares at Shinsou, and Shinsou returns his gaze with a flat expression.

“Is that why Aizawa sent you and Stinky?” Shinsou asks, tipping his head to the side. “Because we all have villain’s quirks?”

Haruta shrugs, looking back down at the ground. “I think that was part of it, yeah.” He takes a deep breath, but doesn’t say anything else. Izuku glances between him and Shinsou.

“And... all three of you have latent quirks,” Izuku says, hesitantly. Ema and Shinsou both look at him, but Haruta keeps his gaze trained on the floor. “So, you would have similar difficulties in battle to me, since I don’t have a quirk and you can’t control yours.”

Ema nods, smiling. “Yeah! I think that’s a big part of it, too. Especially with me and Maka-chan, our quirks can be huge weaknesses. So, maybe he wanted you to see that being quirkless could be a strength!” she says, giving him a thumbs up. Izuku blinks, staring back at her.

“A strength?” he echoes. She nods.

“Yeah! You’re not affected by stuff like Aizawa-sensei’s quirk, and you’re used to fighting without one, so you don’t have to worry so much about bad quirk matchups. It also means people will underestimate you,” Ema says, holding up a finger. “You’re pretty versatile, Midoriya!”

Izuku stares back at her. He wants to think about that, wants to process it, but he also can’t think about himself and quirklessness, not around someone who might be able to read his mind. Instead of thinking about it, instead of letting himself consider what that might mean, he just smiles.

“Thanks, Ema,” he says. “Nobody’s ever said something like that to me before.” Izuku returns her smile, and as Shinsou turns to say something to Haruta, Izuku thinks that training with these second years might not be too bad after all.

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It’s a warm, bright morning, the sun filtering through the leaves of the trees to Izuku’s left as he walks down the sidewalk. This part of town is residential, like where he and his mom live, but it’s not somewhere he remembers being before. The maples and oaks that line the sidewalk are big and old, with thick, strong branches, and the rain lilies that dot the ground between the roots of the trees give the air a sweet smell. Izuku pulls the flip phone Miura had given him out of his pocket, flipping it open to double check the time. *10:57. I’m right on time.*

Izuku looks ahead, where he can see the path turn to his left, into a park. The gate to the park is old and rusted, black paint chipping off of the metal and ivy climbing around the bars of the fence. Izuku steps into the park, glancing around. It's fairly simple, and it's clear from the way that the grass is overgrown and the wooden benches are green with moss that it hasn't been popular in a long time. Izuku finds himself staring at a patch of irises, white and lavender and gold, growing up around a picnic table under a cherry blossom tree, thick with green leaves. Sitting at that table, just beside the irises, is Miura, wearing a deep violet dress that looks like it falls to about her knees. Her hair is in its usual style, and when she turns to look at Izuku, he can see a fresh bruise on the bottom right side of her jaw.

"Miura," he greets, raising a hand and smiling. *Act like we're friends when we meet in public*, the texts had said. *We want anyone who sees us to see a normal friendship, the kind they won't think twice of.*

"Midoriya," she greets, smiling up at him. "Have a seat," she says, quieter, as she gestures at the table in front of her. Izuku nods, sliding into the seat across from her. The wood feels well worn and soft underneath his shorts, but it's slightly damp, too. Izuku grimaces slightly at the sensation, glancing down to look at the wooden seat before looking back up at Miura.

"I've never heard about this park before," Izuku says, tipping his head to the side. Miura nods, her dark eyes meeting his.

"It's good for having conversations we'd rather not have overheard," she says. "I'm also fond of the flowers, here." Miura turns, glancing at the irises. "It's particularly nice in May and June. There's even a couple of wisterias." A small smile spreads on her lips, but after a moment, she sighs, and it fades away. "Now, I have something for you." she reaches down, pulling a black duffel bag Izuku hadn't noticed before up and onto the table.

"Is that...?" Izuku blinks, tugging the bag over to himself when Miura nods.

"It's your new costume, yes. Wear your old one for about another week, then you can start using this one. I have more details on a note inside the bag," she says, and Izuku nods, taking the bag and setting it on the bench next to him. It's heavier than he'd thought it would be for just clothing, and he swears he hears the clink of metal from within the bag.

"T-Thank you," Izuku says, blinking at her. She just sighs, meeting his gaze.

"I also have something less pleasant to give you," Miura says, turning to look off to the side. "I have your first mission."

Izuku swallows. "What is it?" he asks, leaning forward and resting his elbows on the surface of the table. Miura sighs, like she does so often, and crosses her arms over her chest. Izuku can see a series of dark violet bruises on her wrists and fingers, but what stands out to him most clearly is a line of small, circular scars that peek out from under her sleeve, on the inside edge of her arm. Izuku bites at his lower lip. *Cigarette burns? Like Mouse has...*

Miura follows his gaze to her arm, her lips pursing as she tugs down her sleeve to cover the scars. She sighs, moving one of her ponytails off of her shoulder and onto her back, then meets his eyes.

"You'll be collecting information from a pro hero's office within Musutafu," Miura says, folding her arms over her chest. "They provide quirk counseling services for free to certain groups. You'll be gathering quirk registration and analysis records and either memorizing or copying them." She sighs, her gaze serious. "Don't get caught, and don't let them find out anyone's gone through their records."

Izuku nods. "Which pro?" he asks, and Miura nods slightly.

"It's Death Arms," she says. "I'm sure you've seen him around."

"I have," Izuku confirms, nodding. "What do you need the quirk information for?" he asks, tipping his head to the side slightly. Miura sighs, shutting her eyes for a moment.

"You know that I can't tell you that," She answers, her eyes opening and staring at the surface of the table. "But you're smart. You'll figure it out given enough time, I'm sure."

Izuku swallows. "Right," he says. He remembers that man in the suit, with the portal quirk, so long ago. He'd been trying to capture a young girl with an empathy quirk, and Izuku knows just from his brief time at the Gekkeiju base that they value quirks even more than most. They'd been ready to kill him just because he was quirkless. It's not hard for Izuku to guess what they might do with the information he gets, even if he doesn't know *why* they'd do it. *Some kid could become a target because of the information I bring in.*

"Here," Miura says, pulling out a flip phone identical to Izuku's and typing on it, the buttons clicking under her thumb. "I'm giving you the address to the building you were held in. You'll need to go there next weekend and report what you've found." She glances up at him as she flicks the phone shut. "I've been told to inform you that if the address is leaked, the boss will remove one of Mouse's arms," she says, her lips drawn into something between a grimace and a frown. Izuku swallows.

"Oh," he says, voice faint. "Right." He reaches into his pocket, his hand resting on the phone. Miura sighs, putting her own away.

"It's about thirty minutes from here if you take the train and then walk," Miura says. "And you'll be able to see Mouse if you go." She says, smiling faintly. "She's been talking about you."

Izuku blinks. "About me?" he asks, and Miura nods.

"She wanted to know if you made it out okay, mostly." She sighs, a fond smile on her face. Izuku bites at his lower lip.

"Is she okay?" he asks. "I mean, as okay as she can be."

Miura's smile drops some. "Yeah, she's... well." She glances to the side, to where the park continues on. "She hasn't been doing worse than normal." Izuku swallows, nods. At this angle, he can see the full extent of the bruise on Miura's jaw, the way it spreads onto her neck and the way it's dark violet, with dark red and black in the center. *It's recent*, he realizes.

"Next weekend," Izuku says softly. He thinks about returning to that place, about going down the elevator into the basement with the cream color painted thick over the bricks, about seeing Mouse streaked with soot and staring up at him with dark eyes. He thinks about seeing Fury again, about Fury's quirk. Izuku isn't sure what he's more afraid of; Hell, or the way that his heart picks up when he thinks of Heaven. A shiver runs down his spine, and he tells himself it's just fear, that it's not mixed at all with excitement or apprehension.

"Next weekend," Miura says, standing up from the park table. "Stay here for a little bit, play on your phone or something. Wait until I've had plenty of time to leave the area before you go, okay?" She looks at him, meets his eyes. "Be careful, Midoriya."

Izuku blinks, nods. "R-Right," he says. "I'll try."

He watches Miura walk out of the park, her long pigtails swaying in the light breeze as she walks. Her shoes, bright purple high top sneakers, stand out in the bright green of the grass. There isn't a single drop of red or gold or cream in his field of vision, but Izuku feels like he can see Fury and the basement anyway, so he keeps his eyes trained on Miura's back until she disappears around the corner, out of the gate Izuku had walked through not long ago.

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That night, Izuku sits on his bed, turning over a bright orange bottle in his hands. The pills inside rattle softly in the plastic, the white label with his name and the type of medication on it in neat print. They're sleeping pills, ones that the hospital had prescribed Izuku last time he was there, when he'd said he had trouble sleeping. That wasn't true--Izuku can sleep just fine, he just chooses to go out and be Ace at night instead. It'd gotten the doctors off of his back, though, and he'd gotten the prescription for a month's worth of sleeping pills as a result.

The pills, small and white, rattle softly against their cage as Izuku shakes the bottle. He hadn't thought much of them, but when he'd been hiding the duffel bag Miura gave him, stuffing it in his desk drawer to stash it away until it was time to switch from the old costume to the new one, he'd found the bottle of pills, shoved into a clear plastic bag along with the first aid kit and thermometer his mom had packed for him.

Izuku'd looked up what would happen if he took all of them, of course. It might not kill him, but it'd definitely be *bad*. He's been toying with the idea ever since he saw the pills, thought about taking them while he ate dinner and showered. It's not that late right now, but Izuku thinks it'll probably take a bit before they'd kick in, anyway. He could take the pills, go to bed, and he'd either die or he could kill himself when he woke up in the morning to undo what he'd done and any lasting damage the pills caused.

Izuku's a little scared of drugs, to be honest. He's worried that even though he won't have any of the medicine left in his body after resetting, he could get addicted, or he could get caught, and he'd get in trouble. He doesn't want to be reliant on something like that, doesn't want to crave a drug the same way he craves death. But the thing is, Izuku can't just bleed out every night. Each time he does it, he's risking someone walking past the door and smelling the blood, hearing his dying breaths. Dying of a sleeping pill overdose would be quiet. He'd look like he was sleeping.

Izuku takes a deep breath, then unscrews the lid to the bottle, pressing down on the child safety lock on the cap. He tips a few of the pills out onto his hand. They're small, white ovals, chalky and matte. Izuku cocks his head back, pouring the handful of pills into his mouth, grimacing at the taste as he grabs his water bottle from his desk, unscrewing the lid and gulping down a few mouthfuls. He sets the water bottle down, then pours the rest of the pills into his hand, quickly downing them. He drinks a few more sips from his water bottle before standing up, walking over to his desk and opening the top drawer. He places the bottle in the drawer, then shuts it. *Just so that nobody sees it if they come in.*

Izuku sits on the bed, playing on his phone and idly scrolling through the group chat. He tries not to think about it, tries not to pay attention to how he feels, but it's only after about half an hour that he starts to feel sleepy, like something heavy is sitting on his chest. He's been reading something that Kaminari sent a link to for the past five minutes or so, and he realizes only when he reaches the bottom of the page that he doesn't remember any of it. Izuku blinks, trying to focus, but he finds he can't. His eyelids feel heavy, warm.

He sits up, blinking quickly. He'd been lying down on his bed, but he knows that he'll fall asleep if he doesn't sit upright, so he leans his back against the wall and takes deep, slow breaths. The drugs

hit him harder than he expected, but he doesn't feel high or anything like that. Izuku blinks again, his vision blurring slightly. He's not sure he's a fan of the sensation.

Izuku's startled by a knock at his door, and he turns his head to stare at it. There's a pause, a brief break where it's just Izuku and the spinning of the room, but then whoever it is knocks again.

"Midoriya," they say, voice muffled by the door and Izuku's exhaustion. "It's only eight, and your lights are on. I know you're up." Izuku blinks, then hauls himself off of his bed, stumbling to the door. Somewhere, in the back of his mind, he registers that answering the door in his current state is a bad idea, but he can't be bothered to think too deeply about that. He fumbles with the lock for a moment before pulling his door open, looking up to see Monoma staring back at him.

"H-Hi," Izuku says, his voice slightly slurred. "What are you... what are you doing here?" he asks, tipping his head to the side. Monoma quirks an eyebrow at him, then pushes his way past Izuku, into the room.

"I thought I'd come and play cards," he says, shutting the door with one hand and holding up a deck of playing cards with the other. "What's wrong with you?"

Izuku blinks. "Nothing," he says, then stops. He can't think of anything else to say. Monoma narrows his eyes at Izuku, taking a step closer.

"Are you *high*?" he asks, voice incredulous. Monoma sets a hand on Izuku's jaw, tilting his face so he can stare into Izuku's eyes. His hand is warm on Izuku's skin, but Izuku can't quite focus on Monoma's blue eyes, even with him holding still and standing right in front of him.

"Technically," Izuku says, "I guess I am?" He blinks as Monoma clicks his tongue, letting go of Izuku's jaw.

"Figures," he says, scowling. "Your pupils are huge. What the hell are you doing?" He waves a hand. "Kind of a bad place to do drugs, don't you think?" There's an undertone to his voice that Izuku would probably be able to place if he wasn't so *sleepy*. The room has started to warp and spin slightly, and Izuku thinks that moving would be a bad idea, so he holds his position, looking at Monoma.

"I'm not trying to get high," Izuku slurs, blinking again. It's kind of hard to keep his eyes open, really. "Wanted to know if it was enough to kill me." He reaches a hand up to rub at his eyes, but his arm is shaking, trembling. Izuku stares down at it, trying to focus his vision, but all he sees is a blur of small motion as Monoma takes in a sharp breath.

"Fuck, Midoriya," he says, voice rough. Izuku feels a hand touch his shoulder, guiding him to the bed. "Sit down. You look like you're about to keel over." Izuku lets Monoma push him into a sitting position.

"Kinda the point," Izuku says, something like laughter on his lips. Monoma shakes his head at him, crawling onto the bed next to him.

"What did you take, and how much?" he asks, tugging Izuku. Izuku lets him maneuver him so that he's lying down on his side, his head in Monoma's lap and facing out into the room. Izuku recognizes the recovery position, and he kind of feels like laughing again. He wants to tell Monoma that choking on his own vomit would be a *good* thing for Izuku right now, but he can recognize even now that that'd be the wrong thing to say.

"Not telling," Izuku says, humming as he lets his eyes shut. "I hope it works," he murmurs, and he

feels a warm hand rest on his neck, on the exposed skin between his ear and the collar of his long-sleeved shirt.

“Midoriya...” Monoma says, his voice hesitant, rough. “We could tell someone. We *should* tell someone.” Izuku blinks his eyes, open, turns to look at Monoma, but all he can make out is a blur of blue and pale blonde.

“What about the traitor?” he asks, although he’s not entirely sure it comes out clearly enough for Monoma to understand. He thinks he sees Monoma’s brows knitting together.

“Not about your quirk,” he says, and Izuku can see his Adam’s apple bobbing in his throat as he swallows. “About this. We could pass it off as a normal suicide attempt, get you some help.” Izuku snorts, the laughter light and airy. Monoma’s hand moves from his neck to his shoulder, gripping tightly but not painfully.

“Don’t want help,” Izuku says, his eyes sliding shut against his wishes. “Just wanna die.” He feels cold and dizzy, weak and shaky, but he can’t bring himself to care about it. It’s like he’s wreathed in snow--blurry, thick snow--and buried under a mountain of something fuzzy. He doesn’t process what’s happening as Monoma grabs one of his hands, wrapping warm fingers around it.

“Your fingers are turning blue,” Monoma says dully. “You’ll be unconscious soon, won’t you.” It isn’t a question.

“Stay?” Izuku asks, and he doesn’t know why he asks. “You don’t have to... remember, but...” he trails off, trying and failing to take a deep breath. His lungs don’t seem to want to move, staying stubbornly still in his chest. He gets in a small, tiny breath, but it doesn’t bother him. He’s so tired.

“Of course I’m staying,” Monoma scoffs. “And I’m not forgetting this, either. I’m already copying your shitty quirk, Midoriya.” Izuku hears something hard and sharp in his voice, but the world is rapidly fading away.

“Thanks,” Izuku mumbles, trying to squeeze Monoma’s hand where it’s still holding his. He thinks he manages to, but in the next moment, he’s falling asleep, fading into deep, icy nothing.

Chapter End Notes

cw: drug usage as part of suicide, reference to child abuse/torture

[discord!](#)

i hope you enjoyed!!! hopefully it wasn't actually a shitty chapter, i've had major brain fog today for some reason and it's made writing hard ugh

provisional license exam prep, part 3

Chapter Summary

last time: izuku trains more with the second years, gets his first mission from miura, and gets caught mid-suicide by monoma

Chapter Notes

HI GAMERS i hope you all enjoy this!!! im back in my dorm and we have power and water!!! it's not drinkable, but we can shower and it's safe after boiling which is enough for me

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

When Izuku opens his eyes, he's sitting on his bed with an orange bottle in his hands. He blinks, swallowing, and for a horrible, horrible moment he thinks he's already taken the pills, but he gives the bottle a shake and it rattles, the white pills moving around inside. Izuku breathes a sigh of relief, but in the next moment, there's a series of urgent knocks at his door, and Izuku blinks, shoving the bottle of pills under his pillows and standing up. He hurries over to the door and unlocks it, pulling it open to see Monoma, with his blonde hair disheveled and his blue eyes wide.

"Midoriya," Monoma gasps, out of breath as he pushes himself into the room, slamming the door shut behind him. "Have you taken anything?" he asks as he reaches forward, grabbing either side of Izuku's face. Izuku swallows, blinking as Monoma looks into his eyes, his brows furrowed. *He's checking my pupils*, he realizes.

"I--N-No, I haven't," Izuku stammers out, watching as Monoma sighs in relief, releasing Izuku's face and taking a step back, dropping his hands. He squeezes his eyes shut for a moment, before he's moving forward again, pulling Izuku into a tight hug. One of his hands cradles the back of Izuku's head, and the other wraps tightly around his back.

"Don't do that again," Monoma says, voice rough. "What the *fuck*, Midoriya?" He makes a noise that might be either a sob or a laugh, and Izuku blinks, moving his arms to return the hug.

"M-Monoma?" Izuku asks, feeling Monoma's hand grip his hair tightly, but not painfully. "Are you okay...?"

Monoma snorts. "Of course not," he says, and yeah, Izuku can definitely hear tears in his voice. "You're paying for my therapy when all this traitor shit is sorted out." His arms tighten around Izuku slightly, and then he's pulling away, wiping at his eyes before Izuku can see anything. When he pulls his hand away, though, his face is a little red.

"Um," Izuku says, swallowing. "I-I'm sorry, I really didn't mean for you to have to see that," he says, biting at his lower lip. Monoma looks at him, then scoffs, rolling his eyes.

"That's what you're sorry for?" he asks. "You should be sorry for killing yourself in the first

place.” Monoma sighs, folding his arms over his chest and staring Izuku down. “Now tell me why,” he says, and Izuku blinks.

“W-Why?” Izuku asks. “I-I thought I told you, I wanted to see if it was enough to kill me.” Izuku watches as Monoma’s eyes narrow, his lips twitching into a scowl.

“Couldn’t google it like the rest of us?” Monoma says, then blows out a puff of air that pushes up a strand of his blonde hair where it’s fallen in front of his face. “Give me the pills,” he says, and Izuku blinks, shaking his head.

“N-No, I need them,” Izuku says, taking a deep breath. “I-I need to be able to reset quietly, so that-”

“So what?” Monoma interrupts, his lips pressed together in a thin line. “So that you can kill yourself for funsies? Because there *clearly* wasn’t a threat tonight,” he says, gesturing at the air. “I thought you said you killed yourself to *save* people. Who, exactly, did this save?” Izuku swallows. He can feel a bubble of frustration, hot and sticky, build up in his throat. He *really* doesn’t want to cry, not right now.

“I’m training,” Izuku says. “A-After five or so deaths, I start to get sick. So, I’m increasing my limit,” he explains, watching as Monoma’s brows pull together. “It might not be saving someone *now*, but it might *later*.”

Monoma swallows visibly. “I think it’s working,” he says, his voice quiet. “Your training.” Izuku blinks, frowning.

“What does that mean?” Izuku asks, searching Monoma’s gaze for an answer. All he sees is wide blue eyes and a worried frown behind blonde bangs. “What did you see?”

Monoma blinks, then shrugs, looking to the side. “I’ll tell you if you give me the pills,” he says, voice hard. “And you have to tell me how often you’re ‘training,’” he says, making air quotes around the last word. Izuku frowns.

“I-I’m not giving you the pills,” he says, “and even if I did, it wouldn’t stop me. It’s just one of the better methods.” Izuku watches as Monoma meets his eyes again.

“Then I’ll tell your teacher that you’re suicidal,” Monoma says, a determined set to his face. “You give me the pills, or I find your teacher at a random time and tell him at a time when you won’t know to reset. You can take the risk of it being permanent and being watching so you can’t kill yourself at *all*,” he says, taking a deep breath and steeling himself, pulling himself to his full height. “Or, you can give me the pills and tell me about what you’re doing.”

Izuku swallows. “Under my pillow,” he says, voice small, and Monoma moves quickly, darting to the bed and fishing them out. He holds the label up, his eyes squinting as he reads it, and Izuku just watches. He feels something sick and heavy in his gut, and he swallows against the wave of despair that hits him. Monoma sighs, dropping his hand, the pills rattling in their plastic house.

“I don’t think you died, Midoriya,” Monoma says, his face still twisted like he’s in pain. “You didn’t... you weren’t out long enough, and you were still breathing.” He shakes the bottle. “And this isn’t nearly enough to kill someone.”

Izuku blinks, feels his eyebrows furrow. “I didn’t die?” he asks, staring at Monoma. “But then...”

“You don’t need to die to reset,” Monoma says, nodding. He slips his hand with the bottle of pills into the pocket of his shorts. Izuku watches his hand.

"I can't activate it on purpose," Izuku says, biting at his lower lip. "Is it just... on threat of death?"

Monoma shakes his head, shrugging. "I don't know. It could be if you *think* you're dying," he says, then adds quietly, "or if you *want* to die." His voice cracks, slightly. Izuku stares at him a moment, watching his friend stare at the ground, blue eyes behind thick blonde lashes, narrowed and creased. Izuku hesitates for a moment, then takes a step forward, pulling Monoma into another hug. He feels Monoma freeze under his grip for a moment, then relax, and his friend's arms, warmer and longer than his own, wrap around him.

"I'm sorry," Izuku says into Monoma's shoulder. "I scared you." He feels Monoma swallow, feels his throat moving in the tiny distance between it and Izuku's face.

"You did," Monoma says, voice quiet. "You scared me." he pauses a moment, his chest rising and falling. Izuku can feel his heart beating, even strong. "How often are you training your quirk?" Monoma asks, voice dull.

"Every night," Izuku replies, honestly. "I... I kind of like it?" he says, his voice turning into a question at the end. Monoma's fingers grip tightly in the back of Izuku's shirt.

"You're so fucking stupid, Midoriya," Monoma says, and Izuku lets out a breath into his shoulder.

"Yeah," he says, and then, "Call me Izuku." He blurts it out without really thinking, and then Monoma's pulling back a bit, staring at him with narrowed eyes.

"You sure?" Monoma asks, frowning. "You don't... I'm not close to you, not like Uraraka or Todoroki." Izuku meets his gaze, nods.

"I'm sure," he says, then smiles. "We've died together. I think that makes us pretty close," Izuku says, sighing softly. "Plus, we're friends, right?" Monoma blinks, then pulls Izuku back into a tight hug.

"Right," he says. "Friends." He chuckles, a wet laugh that makes Izuku's heart break, just a little bit. "God, Kendou's going to make fun of me. I'm friends with Izuku from class 1-A." He snorts, laughing again, and Izuku smiles into his shoulder.

"I wonder what my classmates think," Izuku says, and Monoma snorts.

"They probably think we're crazy," he says, pulling back, moving so that his hands are resting on Izuku's shoulders. "Which *you* definitely are, by the way," he says, his usual smirk on his face. If his eyes weren't rimmed with red, Izuku might not even be able to tell he'd just been crying.

"D-Do you want to play cards?" Izuku asks, suddenly. Monoma blinks, his smirk dropping and his lips parting slightly. "That's what you came here for, right?" Monoma nods, and he steps back, reaching into one of his pockets and producing a deck of cards. He holds them up, his lazy grin taking its usual place on his face.

"Let's gamble," he says, taking a step back and plopping down onto Izuku's floor. "For every time one of us wins, the other picks a truth or a dare." Izuku blinks, then sits down on the floor across from him.

"Like the game?" he asks, tipping his head to the side. Monoma nods, pulling the cards from their container and starting to shuffle them quickly. His hands move quickly through the red and white cards, his pale fingers nimble. Izuku finds himself watching them.

"Like the game," Monoma echoes. "I'll warn you in advance, though. I'm going to use this to get

you to tell me more about what you're doing to yourself." The cards make a ruffling sound as Monoma looks up, catching Izuku's gaze with icy blue eyes. "If you want to keep your secrets, you'll have to let me dare you."

Izuku sighs, raising an eyebrow. "Isn't this a bit unfair?" he asks, even though he's smiling still. "You're the one who wants to know something from me, Monoma."

Monoma arches an eyebrow, leaning forward and smirking. "So you don't think I have any secrets, then?" he asks, his eyes narrowing. "And call me Neito," he says, dealing Izuku a hand of cards. "It's only fair."

Izuku blinks, taking the cards with a grin. "Thanks, Neito," he says, holding up his hand of cards. Neito returns his smile, half-hidden behind his own cards, their red and white backs contrasting with the bright blue of his eyes.

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Izuku's mom hands him a box with a smile. "I'll get the next one, and that'll be it!" she says, turning to look at Aizawa. "Thank you for giving us a ride! It's a lot easier to move my office with a car than it would be on the train," she says, giving him a bright smile. Aizawa nods to her, his face flat. He's carrying a bag himself, a reusable grocery bag Izuku's mom had used to help pack.

"Of course," he says, sighing as he shuts the trunk of his car. "I wasn't going to make you two carry this stuff all the way from the train station." He's wearing his hair tied back in a ponytail, with a white t-shirt on and shorts instead of his usual hero costume. Izuku isn't used to seeing him dressed this way, but it makes sense, he supposes. *It is Sunday, after all.* Thinking of the date reminds Izuku that next weekend, a week from yesterday, he'll have to meet up with the Gekkeiju at their own base to give his report. Thinking about it sends a shiver down his spine.

"Izuku?" Inko calls, and Izuku blinks, realizing that Inko and Aizawa have started into the campus. Izuku hurries to catch up with them, the cardboard box he's carrying not quite heavy enough to slow him down, but enough that he has to grip tight with his hands to keep a firm grip on it.

"Sorry, mom!" Izuku says as he catches up with them. "I got distracted." Izuku sees Aizawa glance at him, his eyes slightly narrowed, but Izuku pretends he doesn't notice the scrutiny.

"I could tell," Inko says, laughter in her voice. "Let's go! I want to see my new office." She hurries forward, walking through campus. Izuku knows she's been here just the other day, for her interview, but he's still surprised to see her headed for the infirmary wing confidently.

"Well, we'd better hurry up, then," Izuku says, looking over to Aizawa. His teacher nods, but he doesn't move forward. Izuku sees his eyes focus on something just past Izuku, and Izuku turns to see Nezu approaching the two of them, his paws folded neatly behind his back.

"Midoriya! Aizawa! How are you two doing today?" Nezu asks, his voice raised so he can be heard over the short distance. Izuku blinks, glancing at Aizawa, and he's surprised to see a trace of a scowl on his teacher's face. *Are he and Nezu arguing right now?*

"Fine," Aizawa says, voice low. "We're helping his mother move into her new office." He jerks his head to where Inko is still walking on, oblivious to the conversation happening behind her.

"Mm," Nezu hums as he comes to a stop a few feet away from them. "And how have you been, Midoriya?" His beady eyes focus on Izuku, his smile as friendly as ever. "How are you recovering from your time in the hands of the Gekkeiju?"

Izuku blinks. “Um,” he says, his heart jumping up to his throat. Aizawa sighs next to him.

“Nezu, we’re in the middle of something,” Aizawa says, voice low and annoyed. “Can’t this wait?” Izuku swallows, taking a step towards Aizawa and away from Nezu. Nezu’s gaze follows him, and he tips his head to the side slightly.

“I just wanted to ask how young Midoriya here managed to get away from such a powerful villain group,” Nezu says, his tone light and friendly despite his words. “After all, isn’t it kind of suspicious that they’d just let him go?” He blinks, his smile never wavering. Izuku swallows, takes a breath as he feels his heartbeat pick up in his chest.

“They let me go,” Izuku says, his voice small. He sees Aizawa glance over to him, then back at Nezu.

“Back off, Nezu,” Aizawa says, narrowing his eyes at him. “We can talk about this later. Like I said earlier, we’re in the middle of something” Izuku watches as Nezu looks up at Aizawa, his smile widening slightly.

“Of course!” Nezu says, chuckling. “I’ll leave you to it, then.” He turns, starting to walk away, and Izuku starts to relax. Nezu pauses, though, turning to look back over his shoulder.

“I look forward to hearing your story some other time, then, Midoriya,” Nezu says, before turning to walk away from them again. Izuku watches him with a cold pit of dread in his stomach that doesn’t fade the entire time he and Aizawa help his mom move into her new workplace.

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Izuku throws one last kick at the training dummy, hissing in frustration. His muscles feel fast and strong, his movements quick and well timed, but that’s all they are. He drops into a fighting stance, holding it for another second before sighing and letting his hands fall to his sides. There’s sweat gathered on his brow, cooling in the air from the fans above, but Izuku doesn’t bother wiping it off of his face. He turns on his heels, stalking out of the gym. He half expects Cementoss to ask him to stay, but the teacher doesn’t. *Class has technically ended, Izuku notes. We’re all just staying as long as it takes to master our special moves.*

Not that Izuku *has* a special move. He’s been trying to think about what the second years told him, about making his weaknesses into strengths, about coming up with something clever, but no matter what he comes up with, it doesn’t feel *special*. Izuku’s considered a few different things, mostly involving the razor teeth the support department made for him, but everything is just... biting with the teeth, or slashing with a blade. There’s nothing *special* about cutting someone with a knife.

Izuku’s current idea is to do something that disables his opponent’s quirk, something to even the playing field and force his opponent to fight him without their quirk. The problem is, Izuku can’t actually come up with a reliable way to do that. He knows that a lot of quirks rely on the user’s hands for activation, but it’s still not even half of all quirks that work that way. He can’t exactly have his super moves be the kind of thing that he can’t actually *use*.

Izuku stalks out of the gym, headed towards the locker room. He’s covered in a thin layer of sweat that makes his hero costume cling to his skin, uncomfortably warm even in the air conditioned gym. The fabric feels sticky, like it’s been soaked in syrup or blood, and Izuku shivers as he opens the door to the locker room, letting it fall shut behind him. He hates the way he feels right now, tired and exhausted and *useless*. What’s the point of him having a quirk if he’s not going to be able to use it to be a hero? He can’t exactly have his special move be dramatically killing himself on the battlefield.

Izuku walks over to his locker, pulling out his uniform. The fabric of the blazer and shirt feel clean but stiff in his hands, and he sighs as he shuts the locker, listening to the clang of the metal echoing in the quiet room. He wishes that he'd brought a change of street clothes with him, too, but he hadn't even thought to do it until just now. *I'll have to make do*, he thinks, even though he knows that he'll get sweaty enough on the walk across campus that he'll have to wash his uniform.

Izuku turns, meaning to head to the showers, but instead, he jumps in surprise. Todoroki is standing at the end of the row of lockers, still in his costume, watching Izuku. Izuku blinks, surprised.

"T-Todoroki," he says, raising his free hand in a little wave. "Are you done for the day, too?" he asks, and thankfully, his voice doesn't shake beyond that first little stutter. Todoroki tips his head slightly to the side.

"I..." He blinks, giving himself a little shake. "I am, yes. I actually wanted to talk to you." He breathes out, slow and measured, and Izuku can see a little crease between his brows. Izuku frowns.

"To me?" he asks. "Is everything okay?" Izuku's mind is racing with the things that Todoroki might want to ask him about. He could have seen Neito coming to Izuku's room two nights ago, could have seen how upset Neito was. He might have remembered something about Izuku's deaths in the sports festival, could have put together what's going on. He might know something that Izuku doesn't want him to know.

Todoroki nods. "Everything's fine," he says, voice calm. Izuku forces himself to focus. "I was just wondering if you were busy after dinner, tonight." Izuku blinks.

"N-No, I'm not," he says, which is mostly true. Izuku plans on getting up around two in the morning and doing some work as Ace, but Todoroki doesn't need to know that.

Todoroki nods. "Would you like to..." he trails off, swallowing and looking to the side. "Would you care to join me on a walk?" he asks, a faint red flush coming to his cheeks. "I've been told there's a walking path through part of the woods," he continues. Izuku blinks, then smiles.

"Sure!" he says, grinning wider when Todoroki looks up at him, eyes widening slightly. "I'd love to, Todoroki," Izuku says, and Todoroki returns his grin with a small smile of his own.

"Great," Todoroki says, resting one hand on the lockers beside him. "I'll see you tonight, then?" he asks, and Izuku nods.

"See you then!" Izuku says, and when he goes to take his shower, his heart feels a little lighter in his chest.

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Izuku meets Todoroki in the common area for their dorms just after they've both finished eating. The air inside smells salty and thick, like miso soup and fried rice, and Izuku is wearing casual clothing, a long sleeved grey shirt that says 'shirt' on it in katakana and his favorite pair of cargo shorts. Todoroki is dressed in a white t-shirt, a pair of well-fitting black jeans, and leather boots that Izuku's seen him wearing before. He's waiting by the door when Izuku walks up to him, waving.

"Hey, Todoroki!" Izuku says, grinning. "Sorry that took me so long. I wanted to load my dish in the dishwasher before I left, but it had clean dishes in it, so I had to put those up," he explains, gesturing with his hands. Todoroki gives him a slight smile, shaking his head.

"Don't worry about it," he says, turning and placing his hand on the door handle. "Are you ready?"

he asks, glancing back over his shoulder. Izuku nods.

“Yup!” he answers, and Todoroki opens the door. “Have you been to the wooded part of campus before?” Izuku asks as they step outside. The air is warm but not unpleasantly so, and it smells like pine trees and damp soil. Izuku steps forward so he’s walking beside Todoroki as they head down the stairs, toward the woods. The sun hasn’t completely set, yet, and the sky is cast in bright pink and orange hues, the lights of the sunset streaking across the stairs, dappled with black shade where the glow is filtered through the trees. Todoroki shakes his head.

“No, I haven’t,” he says, looking at Izuku. “Have you?” Izuku nods.

“Yeah, Aizawa-sensei had me do some stealth training here last term,” he says, turning toward the path that he’d seen on the night he stashed his things in the hollowed-out tree. “I haven’t walked on the path itself, though. How’d you hear about it?” he asks, cocking his head to the side.

Todoroki hums under his breath, tipping his head back slightly to look at the sky. “Present Mic-sensei mentioned it to me, actually. I was asking him if there would be any English assignments between terms.” Izuku blinks, then frowns.

“W-Wait, there isn’t, right?” Izuku asks, swallowing. Todoroki looks over to him, then chuckles, shaking his head again.

“No, there isn’t,” Todoroki says as Izuku leads them onto the start of the path. The gravel that makes up the path glitters in the light of the sunset, coloring what would normally be tan earth into something like a peach color, sparkling and pretty.

“Oh, thank goodness,” Izuku says, breathing a sigh of relief. Todoroki nods beside him.

“That’s how I felt, as well,” he says. “I want to focus on my training during this time. I need to get my provisional license,” he says, voice getting firmer and more serious near the end. Izuku can’t help the way his lips twitch down at the mention of the license, and he sighs, biting at his lower lip.

“I don’t think Aizawa is going to be able to convince them that I should be allowed to take it,” Izuku admits. “I mean, they have a point. I don’t *technically* need the license, legally. It just really sucks for my career.” He kicks at the gravel, sending a small spray of it flying. He can feel Todoroki’s gaze on the side of his face, but he keeps looking at the ground.

“You could tell them about your future sight quirk,” Todoroki says, voice light but not joking. Izuku looks up at him, quirking an eyebrow up.

“Todoroki, I keep telling you, I don’t have anything like that,” Izuku responds, sighing. Todoroki stares back at him with a straight face, blinking.

“You could lie, then,” he says, and it catches Izuku so off guard that he stumbles, barely catching his balance before he falls to the ground. Todoroki’s hands shoot out, as if to catch him, but Izuku’s righting himself before a second has even passed, laughing and shaking his head.

“What on earth?” Izuku asks, staring incredulously at Todoroki. Behind him, the pine trees rustle softly in the breeze. Izuku can see the sun, fat and round, resting on the horizon. It’s the color of egg yolk, orange-yellow and huge.

“I mean,” Todoroki says, tilting his head slightly to the side. “You might have a quirk, right? You should tell them that you could be using a quirk without knowing, so you need the license just in case.” He shrugs. “Or you could just tell them you’ve manifested an analysis quirk or a foresight

quirk, like the one you're hiding." Izuku ignores the last part.

"That's... actually not a bad idea," Izuku says, chewing at the dead skin on his bottom lip. "I would be getting the license for any quirk I might have but not be aware of, not for any specific quirk. I don't have the extra toe joint, so that could actually work..." Izuku brings a hand to his chin, holding it. "I'd have to ask Aizawa-sensei to relay the message, and he'd have to do a good job of presenting it to the commission, but it's a valid point. I'll need to look through the records to see if there's any kind of a precedent. There's obviously not a quirkless case, but--"

"Midoriya," Todoroki says, a smile on his face and amusement in his voice. "You're muttering," he says, and Izuku blinks, pulling his hand away from his face and feeling his cheeks flush red.

"Oh!" he says, glancing away in embarrassment. "Sorry, I didn't mean--" he starts, but Todoroki shakes his head, cutting him off.

"It's okay," Todoroki says. "I like it." He gives Izuku a warm look, then turns to look in the direction they're walking once again. Izuku smiles, feeling a different sort of warmth wash over him as he walks beside his friend. He glances up again, at the sky, and he can see some glittering stars starting to peek through on the side of the sky opposite the lazy sun. Izuku knows he'll be tired later, when he goes out as Ace, but for now, it's worth it to have this time.

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The moon is a thin sliver that hangs in the sky, a bright slice out of the navy-blue backdrop. Izuku stands at the edge of a roof, looking out on the world. Below him, the city of Musutafu glitters in multicolor, the signs of the businesses and the golden glow of the streetlamps contrasting to the cool tone of the sky. It's a very different kind of beautiful than the woods had been, earlier, but Izuku likes it just the same. He jumps from the roof, onto the fire escape below, and makes his way toward his destination.

He's in his old costume, since Miura had told him to wait a bit to use the new one, but frankly, he's excited to make the switch. He'd peeked at it, found the pieces of the costume alongside some formal clothing that Miura's note had said were for meetings. The clothes and weapons are all personalized and tailored in a way that nothing Izuku has ever owned has been. Izuku moves down onto the street below, taking the sidewalk towards where he knows Death Arms' agency is.

Even though Aizawa had warned them all that he had patrol early mornings on weekdays, Izuku still finds himself surprised to see his teacher on the streets, his white capture scarf catching the pale light of the moon as Izuku walks towards him. It's been so long since Izuku has been out as Ace that it takes him a second to remember the easy confidence he tries to give off as the vigilante, and he slides his hands into his pockets, putting a smile on under his mask as he walks up to Aizawa. The pro is staring down at him, and Izuku thinks he can take a little risk here.

"Hey, Eraserhead," he says, stopping a few feet away from his teacher. "I haven't seen you in a while. Have you been on vacation?" *If I've been busy, Aizawa should have been, too. It doesn't mean he wasn't patrolling, but...*

"Something like that," Aizawa deadpans, turning to face Izuku fully, staring at him through golden goggles. "I haven't seen you on the news at all, either," he says, and Izuku shrugs.

"There just hasn't been anything interesting enough to get myself caught on camera for," Izuku says. "With Kamino and all that, more heroes have been out, anyway." Aizawa nods, seemingly satisfied.

“You’ve been staying away from the villain groups?” he asks, and Izuku swallows. He hopes Aizawa doesn’t notice.

“Something like that,” Izuku answers, shrugging as he echoes Aizawa’s earlier words. He can see Aizawa’s eyes narrowing behind the goggles. “I gotta go, anyway. I’ll see you later, Eraser!” he says, before turning to the nearest alleyway and hopping over to a fire escape. He knows full well that he’s not going fast enough to actually evade Aizawa if the man wanted to catch him, but Izuku doesn’t hear anything to indicate someone’s following him as he hauls himself back up onto the roof. It sucks, since going by ground might be quicker, but Izuku turns, moving along the rooftops. *I’ll have to go a roundabout way, so Aizawa doesn’t track me.*

As Izuku jumps from rooftop to rooftop, he thinks about what he’s doing, exactly. He feels the way his feet slap against the concrete of the roofs, the way the warmth still lingering from the daytime clings to him through his costume. He smells the gasoline-and-rain smell that the city tends to have on nights like these, hears the buzz of cars and the muffled beat from clubs.

Izuku’s plenty aware of what’s going on around him, but he’s still in his head, his thoughts swirling and poking at him. He imagines himself going to Death Arm’s agency, breaking in a back door (would he pick a lock? Unscrew the hinges?) and sneaking through a dark hallway. Izuku doesn’t know if there would be security cameras or an alarm, but he doesn’t think it’d really matter, anyway. He’d find the files for the quirk counseling, and he’d read them. He’d run his eyes along the lines of text, memorizing like he does for school, and then he’d kill himself. He’d go home and write it all down before he forgets, stash it away somewhere that nobody would find, and then next weekend, he’d give the information to the Gekkeiju.

Izuku would give the information to the Gekkeiju, and then they might see someone’s name on the list, might see a child’s quirk, and they might like it too much. They might tell Izuku to find that child’s address, to learn their routine. They might ask him to kidnap them, or maybe they wouldn’t trust him to be able to do something like that so early on. Maybe they’d send somebody else, and then one day, Izuku would go down to the basement and there’d be another room with a crayon drawing taped to the outside. Maybe he’d go to visit Mouse and find another terrified child in a filthy, soot-covered room. Maybe there’d be a child there, because of him.

Izuku slides to a stop on the roof he’s running along. He drops into a crouch, looking over the edge, at the building that he recognizes as Death Arm’s agency. He can see from here that the hinges of the doors are all on the outside--he could unscrew them, easily. He doesn’t see any exterior cameras, either, doesn’t see any signs indicating a security system. Izuku knows he could break in. He knows he could complete his mission without getting caught. It would be easy.

But he doesn’t. Izuku crouches there until the muscles in his legs burn from squatting, until his feet fall asleep, his toes tingling with pins and needles, but he doesn’t go to the door. He doesn’t jump from the rooftop, and he doesn’t break in. He can’t bring himself to.

It’s only when he starts to see the faint edge of sunlight peeking up in the east that he resigns himself to it. Izuku turns around to head back to UA, his limbs stiff and sore. His heart is heavy as he crosses the city from above, but he thinks it’s not quite as heavy as it would be, if he’d actually done what he set out to do.

content warnings: implied/referenced child abuse, talk about drug overdose

[discord!](#)

i hope you enjoyed!!!! i had a lot of fun writing this one, even though i feel like some of the bits are a little rushed. school starts again tomorrow for me after nearly 2 weeks off from the emergencies, and it feels so strange. i feel like they should just cancel the semester at this point lol

provisional license exam prep, part 4

Chapter Summary

last time: izuku talks with monoma, goes for a walk with todoroki, helps his mom move into her new office at UA, and doesn't break into the building he's supposed to

Chapter Notes

HI GAMERS UR LOOKING POG AF TODAY school sucks and is overrated can i be a rich YA novel author already

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

When Neito shows up at his door later that week, Izuku isn't exactly surprised. As soon as he sees his friend, blonde hair damp like he'd just finished showering, he smiles, opening the door wider.

"Neito," Izuku says, stepping to the side so his friend can walk inside. "How're you?" Neito steps inside, answering as Izuku pulls the door shut behind him.

"As well as can be expected," Neito answers, a frown on his face as he raises a hand to dramatically push his bangs out of his face. "I'm doomed to fail this exam, though," he sighs, shaking his head. "I can't come up with a super move for the life of me." Izuku nods, smiling sympathetically.

"Me neither," Izuku says, taking a few steps back before flopping onto his bed. "Do you wanna play cards again? It was fun last time," he says, feeling the bed compress next to him as Neito takes a seat.

"Only because I went easy on you with the questions," Neito scoffs, pulling the cards out from his shorts pocket. "I'm not going to hold back this time," he says, narrowing his eyes at Izuku.

"Well, you won't have to if I win," Izuku says, shrugging. "Blackjack again?" he asks, watching as Neito shifts so he's sitting crosslegged on the bed, facing Izuku.

"Yup," Neito says, popping the *p*. He starts to shuffle the cards, moving quickly. "What's your death count at for this week?" he asks as he flips the cards. Izuku squints at him.

"Shouldn't you save that for if you win?" Izuku points out, and Neito shrugs.

"If it was zero, you'd just say that, wouldn't you?" he asks, dealing himself and Izuku each two cards, one face up and the other face down. Izuku has a face-up four of spades, while Neito has a ten of diamonds. Izuku bites at his lip and picks up his cards. *Ace of spades, huh?* He swallows. *With a fifteen or five, I should hit.*

"Hit, please," Izuku says, and Neito nods, gesturing with his free hand at the deck. Izuku pulls a card from the top. It's a jack of clubs.

"I'm hitting as well," Neito says, pulling another card from the deck. He tucks it into his hand, his eyes narrowing, then shutting as he sighs, dropping his cards. "Bust," he says, leaning back. Izuku glances down at the cards, a ten, a seven, and a five.

"Truth or dare?" Izuku asks with a smile, glancing up at Neito. Neito sighs, rolling his eyes and tipping his head back.

"Truth, I guess," he says, tone heavy with fake annoyance. Izuku isn't fooled--he can see the smile on Neito's face.

"Have you told anyone about me?" Izuku asks. Neito blinks, and Izuku shrugs. "You said you weren't gonna hold back, so I won't, either." Neito glances to the side.

"I haven't told anybody about your quirk," he says, "but I've talked to Vlad-sensei a little. I just said I was worried about a friend, but I didn't give any specifics." He swallows, glancing at Izuku, meeting his eyes. "That's fine, isn't it?"

Izuku blinks, then nods, hesitantly. "I... I couldn't ask you not to," he says, grimacing. "I know it isn't fair of me to rely on you like this."

Neito raises an eyebrow. "I'm the one who keeps coming back, aren't I?" he says, quirking the edge of his lips up. "You haven't forced me into this. Even with the training camp, that was Muscular's fault, not either of ours." He grabs the deck of cards, dealing them both another hand. Izuku's face-up card is an ace, and Neito's is a seven.

Izuku picks up his hand. "I like that you keep coming back," he says, giving Neito a bright smile. Neito narrows his eyes at him, but Izuku can see him turn slightly red.

"You just like to beat me at cards," Neito says, glancing down at his hand. "Do you want another card?" he asks, and Izuku checks his own hand, that ace and a six.

"Yes, please," Izuku says, giving Neito a smile and a nod. Neito passes him a card, then takes one for himself. It's an eight, and Izuku bites at his lip. *I'll chance it*, he thinks.

"Another one, please," Izuku says, and Neito nods, passing another over. It's a nine; Izuku sets his cards down.

"Bust?" Neito asks, looking down at them. "Damn, what a waste of a 21," he says, setting down his own seven, five, and nine. "It means it's my turn, though," he says, a slight smile on his face. "Truth or dare?"

Izuku nods. "Truth," he says, since that's what Neito started with. Neito nods.

"How many times have you killed yourself since Saturday? Don't count the one I saw," he says, gathering their discarded cards into a stack. Even though he isn't looking directly at Izuku, Izuku's well aware that he's paying full attention.

"Um," Izuku says, swallowing. "Monday night, and then yesterday," he says, biting at his lower lip. "I haven't yet today." Neito sighs.

"Good," he says. "Are you going to later?" he asks, dealing out the next hand of cards. Izuku swallows.

"That's two questions," he points out, and Neito glances up at him sharply, his lips tugging into a thin line. "But no," Izuku adds, quietly. "Not if you want me not to."

Neito sighs, meeting Izuku's eyes. "I don't want you to kill yourself *ever*," he says, quietly. "But I'll settle for you not doing it tonight." Izuku picks up his hand, glances at the cards.

"I won't even make you use a dare," Izuku says, a smile creeping up on his lips. It works, because Neito snorts and rolls his eyes.

"So generous," he says, voice full of amused sarcasm. "How will I ever repay you?" he asks, then gestures to the deck. Izuku shakes his head, and they both flip their hands over.

"You can start by picking truth or dare," Izuku says, giggling. His ace and king combo solidly beats Neito's pair of queens. Neito groans, dropping his cards, but they're both smiling wide.

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When Izuku steps out of the train station and into the bright afternoon light, it feels unfair, considering what he's here for. He's wearing the white button down, black slacks, and dark green vest that Miura had given him to wear to the base, with the black tie tucked into his pocket. He'd tried for about half an hour to get it tied properly before deciding that no tie was better than a messily tied one. Even though it's lighter than his UA uniform would be, it's still too warm for this weather, and Izuku can feel himself already starting to sweat as he hurries along the sidewalk, walking quickly.

Izuku pushes through the people on the streets, hoping that nobody looks at him for too long. He's sure that the formal clothing that isn't a school uniform helps somewhat, but he's all too aware of the fact that his face has been on national television. If someone recognizes him as a UA student here, it might not matter that he's kept the address of the base private. He almost wishes he was in his Ace costume instead, but he knows that's not an option, either.

He can see the building before he actually reaches it. It's seven stories tall, which isn't this unusual for this city, but the long windows and reflective, mirrored glass is familiar. Izuku had seen it from the outside when Clean took him to the payphone after his release, so he knows what to look for, even if he'd only seen it briefly. It doesn't feel quite as terrifying now as it did then, when he was wearing his bloodied clothing and exhausted from being in that place for so long, but that doesn't stop Izuku from feeling a tingle of anxiety as he walks up to the tower, setting his hand on the door and pushing it open.

The interior of the first floor is much the same as it had been when he was here as a prisoner. The room is brightly lit, with the natural light filtering through the windows mixing with the lights hanging from the ceiling. The dark haired woman from before, Yamamoto, is sitting behind a reception desk, just like before. Izuku walks up to her, but she doesn't look up from the computer.

"Midoriya," she greets, nodding her head slightly without looking at him. "You'll be seeing Lord Fury, today," she says, reaching to type something out on the keyboard. "He's expecting you. Second door to the right, third floor."

Izuku blinks. "T-Thanks," he says, and Yamamoto nods.

"I'll let him know you're on your way up," she replies, voice calm and even. Izuku swallows, walking towards where he knows the elevators to the upper floors are. It's strange, being allowed to move through the building like he's one of them now. *That's because I am*, he reminds himself, glancing over to the little television area to his left. The television is on and muted, just like before, but the news doesn't have anything Izuku hadn't already read this morning before leaving for the train, and there doesn't seem to be anyone sitting on the couch. Izuku isn't sure if he's glad that Manami isn't there or if he's disappointed. *At least she's reliable*, he muses as he stops in front of

the elevators, pressing the call button. *She'll kill me if I mess up, and she'll do it quickly.*

The elevator chimes softly, the stainless steel doors sliding open. Izuku steps into the space and presses the button for the third floor. He can hear his breathing in the small space, and he forces himself to breathe slowly and evenly, like he isn't nervous to see Fury again. *If something goes wrong, I just kill myself and do it again,* he reminds himself, but the thought somehow isn't a comforting one. Izuku isn't sure he wants to have to face Fury more than once.

The doors of the elevator open, too soon for Izuku to be comfortable with it. He takes a deep, steadying breath and steps into the hallway. It looks ordinary in all respects, if a bit fancy. The floor is the same polished marble as the first floor, and the walls are painted a rich navy blue. It looks, for all intents and purposes, like a very fancy office building; there are hallways stretching out to the left, right, and in front of Izuku, and there are a number of rooms off of each one. At the end of each hall, he can see the floor to ceiling windows that seem to cover the building.

"Second door to the right," Izuku whispers to himself as he turns to the right, walking down the hallway. His shoes tap against the marble floor, echoing in the space. He can feel his pulse in his throat, fast and hard, even though he wants to tell himself that he's perfectly calm, that he's not nervous about this. That part of him isn't excited.

The second door to the right is simple, a plain, hardwood door in the same color as the flooring on the seventh floor. There's a small, plexiglass window in the door, but it's covered from the inside with a navy blue curtain. Izuku swallows, raising a hand and knocking on the door twice with his knuckles. Almost immediately, he hears a reply.

"Come in," Fury says, his voice barely audible through the thick door. Izuku thinks it must be solid wood, which would be *expensive*. He bites at his bottom lip, then places his hand on the door knob and turns it, pushing the door in. It opens easily, the hinges silent and smooth. Izuku swallows, glancing around the room before he takes a step inside.

It's a fairly small room, with a thick, blue carpet the same color as the walls in the hallway. The walls are painted a cream color, but it's different than the one in the basement. The walls are decorated with paintings depicting the ocean, ships and lighthouses and the sea in a storm. The back wall is all window, showing a view of a park that must be behind the Gekkeiju building. Inside the room, there's a low table, with plush, black armchairs on either side, and it smells strongly of cigarette smoke. Fury is sitting in the one facing to the right, and he's wearing a pair of black slacks and a white button-down that matches Izuku's. His waistcoat, though, is a warm amber-gold, the same color as his eyes, and his black tie is tied neatly. He's wearing his usual pair of dark sunglasses, and when Izuku walks in the room, his eyes follow him, a smirk creeping up his face.

"Midoriya," Fury says, leaning one elbow on the arm of his chair and leaning his face against his hand. "Or should I call you Ace?" He gestures to the chair across from him, on the other side of the table. "Have a seat."

Izuku swallows, taking the few steps to close the distance between himself and the chair. He sits on the edge of it, holding himself stiff and still so that he doesn't shake. He can see Fury's eyes, shadowed by his glasses, move to look him over.

"Where's your tie?" he asks, tipping his head to the side. "I know Sumire gave you one." Izuku blinks, reaching into his pocket and pulling it out.

"I, um, I couldn't tie it," Izuku replies, feeling his face flush slightly in embarrassment that only grows worse when Fury chuckles under his breath, clicking his tongue. He stands up, and Izuku

flinches reflexively. Fury raises an eyebrow at him, then makes his way around the table. Izuku swallows, scooting back in his chair slightly as Fury moves to stand in front of him. Izuku is shorter than Fury normally, but with him seated and Fury standing, the difference in their heights is even more obvious, and it makes Izuku's heart jump into his throat. Fury holds a hand out.

"Hand it over," he says, and Izuku blinks. "Your tie," Fury clarifies, an annoyed tone to his voice. He shakes his hand impatiently, and Izuku swallows, reaching up and dropping his tie in Fury's hand. Fury takes it, holding it out and scowling at it before pressing it to his leg, like he's trying to smooth out the wrinkles. Izuku watches as he takes the tie, then reaches for Izuku. Izuku swallows but holds still, only twitching slightly as Fury reaches around his neck to loop the tie around. His hands move to the front of Izuku's throat, and Izuku is sure he can feel Izuku's too fast pulse as he ties the tie in quick, neat movements. Izuku doesn't breathe until Fury pulls away, smirking at Izuku.

"There, you look much better, now," he says, eyes narrowing behind his glasses. He takes a step back, sitting on the edge of the low coffee table and crossing his legs over one another. Even with him sitting, they're so close that their knees almost touch, and Izuku scoots back in the chair, pressing into the back of the chair. He knows Fury sees it, but all Fury does is smile and reach into the pocket of his slacks, pulling out a box of cigarettes and a slim, silver lighter. He takes a cigarette from the box, placing it between his lips and lighting it before tucking the box and the lighter back into his pocket.

"You don't might if I smoke, do you?" Fury asks, his lips curled up at the edges as he takes a drag off his cigarette, blowing the smoke into Izuku's face. Izuku screws his eyes up against it, fighting the urge to cough. "Now, your report?" Fury asks, tapping his nails against the wood of the table with the hand that isn't fiddling with his cigarette.

Izuku swallows. "I-I don't have anything to report," he says, quietly. He watches one of Fury's eyebrows climb his forehead, his lips dropping into a scowl.

"You didn't get the information you were asked for?" He asks, pulling his cigarette from his mouth and sighing.

"N-No," Izuku confirms, swallowing. He can taste smoke on the back of his tongue. "I-I found the agency, but I couldn't get any information," he says. Fury glares at him with narrowed eyes.

"God, you're fucking *useless*," he snarls. "Did you even try? Or did you chicken out?" Fury asks, rapping his nails on the wood of the table more quickly, more forcefully. "I'll make this clear now," Fury says, leaning forward and staring at Izuku through dark glass. "You don't get to pick and choose which missions you do. If you can't or won't complete them on time, you're going to suffer for it."

"R-Right," Izuku replies, his throat tight. "It won't happen again," he says, and Fury snorts.

"Damn right it won't," he says, putting his cigarette to his lips and sucking in a breath of air. The tip of the cigarette glows amber-bright as he pulls it away from his face, blowing the smoke out slowly.

"Roll up your sleeve," Fury says, voice low. Izuku blinks.

"W-What?" he asks, and Fury's face drops into a scowl.

"You heard me," he says, looking at Izuku with disdain. "Roll up your sleeve, or it'll be your face, instead," he says, and Izuku swallows. He unbuttons the cuff of his dress shirt on his left arm,

rolling it up to just below the self harm scars on his elbow. Fury sticks his cigarette back in his mouth, then reaches forward, grabbing Izuku's wrist with his left hand and tugging his sleeve up further with his right. His fingers are hot on Izuku's skin, squeezing the bones in Izuku's wrist together, and Izuku hisses, instinctively trying to pull back as Fury yanks his sleeve up, revealing Izuku's scars. Fury stares.

"You're like my sister," he says, amusement in his voice as his right hand trails down Izuku's arm, pressing into the freshly healed scars. "Do they still hurt?" he asks as his fingers dig into the flesh. "Or have they healed too much for that already?" His grip on Izuku's wrist is bruisingly tight, and Izuku can't help but squirm.

"T-They don't hurt," he says, truthfully, but Fury digs his fingers into the flesh of Izuku's bicep all the same. He grins wide when Izuku tries to jerk his arm away.

"They will," Fury says, like it's a promise. His right hand moves to his mouth, pulling the cigarette out and holding it between two fingers. Smoke curls from the cherry at the tip, and Izuku clenches his jaw tight, knowing what's going to happen even before it does. Fury moves his hand, holding the cigarette above Izuku's bicep for a moment before he presses it to Izuku's skin. There's a faint hissing noise, and Izuku bites his tongue through the sharp, hot spot of pain on his arm. Fury presses the cigarette there for a moment longer, then pulls back. In its place, there's a blistering dot of red and white skin.

"Hmm," Fury hums, putting the cigarette back in his mouth. "Not as bad as you thought, was it, brat?" he asks as the pricking, sharp pain fades into a dull, strong burning sensation. Izuku swallows the saliva that's started to pool in his mouth. Fury reaches back into his pocket, pulling out the lighter and flicking it on, holding it up to the cigarette he's holding in his lips. Izuku tries to pull his arm out of Fury's grip, but he can't, not with the way he's holding him so tightly that Izuku's fingers are starting to fall asleep.

"Tell me how it felt," Fury says around his cigarette, and Izuku looks up to see him watching Izuku with a scowl on his face. Izuku swallows.

"I-It hurt," he says, and Fury sighs, rolling his eyes. He pulls air through his cigarette, then pulls it from his mouth and brings it to the skin under the last mark, just above Izuku's elbow. Izuku hisses at the sharp pain and the heat.

"You can do better than that," Fury grumbles, twisting and pressing the cigarette into Izuku's flesh. Izuku squirms, gritting his teeth together against the sharp, burning pain that seems to radiate through his whole arm.

"I-It's hot," Izuku says, struggling back, his body knocking into the back of the chair. "It f-feels like my skin is melting," he hisses out. "And it's--it's spreading through the whole area." Izuku lets out a breath when Fury pulls the cigarette away, glancing at it. He lets Izuku's wrist go, and Izuku jerks his arm back, cradling it against his chest. Fury considers the cigarette, then takes out his lighter and lights it, the lighter flame flickering as the air conditioning comes on in the room.

"Do you understand, kid?" Fury asks, looking at Izuku through his glasses as he places the cigarette back in his mouth. "That's letting you off easy, as far as I'm concerned. Next time you show up without having completed your job, it'll be a lot worse," he says, a hint of laughter in his voice.

"I-I understand," Izuku replies back, quietly. He tugs at his sleeve, trying to pull it back down over his burns, but Fury reaches out, lightning quick.

“Wait,” he says, his voice sharp. “I’m not done with you yet. That was just your punishment for being useless,” he says, his eyes narrowing at Izuku through his glasses. Izuku isn’t sure which eye is worse to look at--his right, with the milky white tone and the strange shape, or his left, golden with the sunburst pattern that just makes Izuku think about his quirk. Izuku swallows, looking down at his arm, instead. Fury’s hand is gripping his forearm, just above where his wrist is already starting to bruise. The two circular burns are bright, angry red, and the skin around them is starting to swell.

“Oh,” Izuku says, voice dull. He feels like he’s zooming out from the world. Everything feels distant except the hot, burning sensation in his arm. Fury smiles, a grin that shows his teeth.

“What’s the worst pain you’ve ever been in?” Fury asks, his voice light, like he’s talking to a friend. Izuku doesn’t have to think about his answer.

“Your quirk,” Izuku answers, and Fury raises an eyebrow, hums.

“Mm, that’s interesting,” Fury says, leaning back and taking a drag from his cigarette. “Considering that I’ve never used ‘Hell’ on you.” Izuku thinks he’d be freezing up in fear or something, if he didn’t feel so foggy. He swallows.

“You would have, in one of the futures,” Izuku says. “I feel what would have happened when I use my quirk.” Fury stares back at him. The end of the cigarette glows brightly.

“Interesting,” Fury says. He blows a mouthful of smoke downward. “Second worst, then.” He taps his free hand, the left one, against the table. Izuku glances down at it, then at his own wrist. He can see Fury’s fingers mirrored in the shape of the bruise.

“Being burned,” Izuku says. He remembers the feeling of Kacchan’s quirk on his arms, the feeling of being burned alive in the USJ attack. He remembers Todoroki’s quirk, remembers the way his skin felt as it boiled. Compared to those times, the cigarette burns don’t really hurt at all.

“Oh, really?” Fury says, leaning back slightly. “Looks like I’ve already used that one, then,” he says, mock disappointment in his tone. His mouth curves into a vicious grin, and he leans forward again, reaching a hand out for Izuku’s face. Izuku jerks his head back, out of the way of his grip, and Fury sighs, shaking his head.

“Izuku,” he coos, scooting forward on the table, so he’s closer to Izuku, their legs touching at the knees. “You know I’m doing this for your own good, right?”

“D-Don’t call me that,” Izuku says, but it comes out as almost a whisper. His throat feels tight. “You d-don’t get to call me by my given name.” Fury clicks his tongue, reaching out again as Izuku pulls back. There’s nowhere for Izuku to go, though, not without attacking Fury, and he doesn’t dare.

“See, *Izuku*,” Fury starts, putting his hand on Izuku’s cheek. “You don’t have experience working in the criminal world. Things work differently, here.” His hand moves down to Izuku’s jaw, and his fingers press into the bone. “If you don’t learn quickly, you won’t last very long.” He tips Izuku’s jaw up, forcing Izuku to look into his eyes through the sunglasses. “This is just the best way for you to learn.” Izuku swallows. He doesn’t feel quite as fuzzy, quite as unfocused.

“Don’t call me by my given name,” Izuku repeats, and Fury *laughs*, tipping his head back and cackling. His grip on Izuku’s jaw is painful.

“Hold still,” he says, voice a low growl through his teeth as his other hand comes up to Izuku’s

mouth, hovering over it. "If you don't, I'll hurt Mouse instead." Izuku stiffens, and Fury laughs again. "What, you think I didn't notice that you were fond of her? You're such an amateur, Izuku."

His voice lowers in volume as he presses his hand to Izuku's mouth and nose in a smooth motion, shoving Izuku's head back against the back of the armchair. Izuku tries to suck in a breath of air, but his eyes widen as he realizes that he can't breathe, not with Fury's hand squeezing his nose shut and covering his mouth. Izuku squirms, trying to move his head back to get away from Fury's hand, but he can't. A shout rises in his throat, but it's smothered by Fury's palm as Izuku resists the urge to try and pull Fury's hands away from his face.

"Shh," Fury whispers, his other hand moving down to press Izuku's shoulder into the armchair. "I told you to hold still, didn't I?" Izuku swallows, trying to force himself to hold still. *I have to endure this. For Mouse*, he tells himself. Fury smiles, and his face looks almost gentle. Izuku wishes he hadn't been on the exhale when Fury started to smother him, because Izuku can already feel the desperate burn in his lungs, can already see the fuzziness growing in the edges of his vision. It doesn't stop him from seeing Fury move the hand that isn't choking Izuku up to his own face, pulling at his sunglasses. Izuku slams his eyes shut, and he hears Fury laugh, loud and bright. Izuku's lungs ache for air.

"Open your eyes, Izuku," Fury says, his voice sharp. "You listen to me, understood? When I give you an order, you obey it." His voice is a mixture of anger and laughter that makes Izuku's stomach roll in his belly. "You obey my orders, or both you and the kid will suffer. So open your eyes."

And Izuku does. His lungs burn with bright, sucking pain, like they're being pulled in on themselves, and he braces himself for worse as he opens up, looking into Fury's golden eye. But instead of pain, he feels his body swell with warmth, with the feeling of peace and comfort and safety. He feels amazing, like he's walking on air, like he's sinking into a warm bath, like he's bleeding out, and he feels the tension drain from his shoulders. It doesn't matter that he's out of air any more, that his lungs are screaming for him to take a breath. Izuku relaxes, going limp in Fury's gaze, and he vaguely can hear Fury laugh as his hand is pulled back.

Izuku gasps for breath, and Fury reaches to his face, pulling the sunglasses back up over his eyes. The pain comes back to Izuku in a rush, just like before, and the only thing he can think about is the way that his chest is burning, the way the exposed, burned skin on his left arm stings and prickles as he doubles over, gasping in loud, desperate breaths. His head aches like it's been struck with a hammer, and he can feel his pulse behind his eyes.

"See?" Fury says, and Izuku squeezes his eyes shut at the pain the noise sends through his skull. "That wasn't so bad, was it?" Izuku coughs weakly into his lap, letting himself rest on his knees. He can see Fury's feet, along with the floor below. A hand comes down on the back of his head, and Izuku flinches violently. The contact itself is painful, like his nerves are crying out at him, but the pain only grows as Fury yanks him up by his hair, pulling him back into a sitting position.

He watches him with a smile, his eyes behind glasses again. "Go to your room. You remember where it is, right?" Fury says, his eyes narrowing. "Fourth floor. Your villain name should be on the doorplate by now. I want to see you again tomorrow morning." His eyes flicker down to Izuku's arm. "Don't cover them up when you come to see me." He releases his grip on Izuku's hair, but Izuku manages to stay upright, even though his vision is warping and swirling.

Izuku swallows. "Y-Yes sir," he says, quietly, and Fury smirks.

"Good, good," he says, leaning back and folding his arms over his chest. "You're learning."

Chapter End Notes

content warnings: graphic torture (burning, suffocation), manipulation, abuse

[discord!](#)

i hope you enjoyed!!! ik some ppl were concerned about romance and i will say that
if romance happens in this fic, it won't be a main focus and certainly it won't happen
any time soon. i'd rather the fic focuses on having healthy, well developed platonic
relationships, especially given what izuku is going through

provisional license exam prep, part 5

Chapter Summary

last time: izuku and neito play cards, also fury tortured izuku or something

Chapter Notes

hi gamers today's been tough maybe some whump will make me feel better (this chapter is hot shit but that's okay)

(fic has been moved to explicit rating but it will NOT contain sexual content. the rating is for the violence/gore/torture)

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

When Izuku wakes up in the morning, alone in his room at the Gekkeiju base, his heart feels like a lump of cold ice in his chest. He takes out his phone, glancing at his messages with his mom from the night before.

I can't come home tonight, he'd said. *I'm safe, though*. His mom had replied nearly instantly.

Be careful, she'd sent. *Be safe. I love you*. Izuku hadn't been able to make himself reply in words, but he'd sent her a heart emoji instead. He'd gone to sleep, right after that, his head sinking heavily into the pillow on his bed. It doesn't feel like his, even as he pulls himself out of the bed and sets his bare feet on the wooden floor. It's just a room that he's allowed to be in, a room that he can spend time in while he waits for Fury to hurt him more.

Izuku steps quietly across the room, to the bathroom, flicking on the lights. The light spills across the tile floor, and Izuku has to squint in the brightness. He stares at his reflection in the mirror, all tangled dark green hair and bags under his eyes like bruises. There is a bruise on his jaw, just at the very bottom right edge. It looks like one he's seen on Miura before, and for some reason, the thought makes him feel a little sick to his stomach. He raises his left arm to the light, grimacing at the sight of it. He'd taken his shirt off to sleep, too uncomfortable in his formal dress shirt, and so there's nothing to hide the huge, hand-shaped bruise that wraps around his wrist and forearm. It's swelled up and turned a dark mixture of reds and blues and violets, looking almost as if it's broken. Izuku wonders if it might be.

The burns, by comparison, don't look nearly as bad, even though they hurt far worse. The two matching red circles are in a line straight down his bicep to the crease just above his elbow, and the bottom one is deeper, more severe. The center of that one is white, waxy looking, and Izuku knows enough about burns to know that's far worse than the blistering mark that is the top burn. *Third degree*, his brain supplies helpfully. He wishes it wouldn't.

There's ash in both burns, but Izuku can't bear to look at them any longer. He knows he should clean them, should dress the wounds, but he just can't. Not to mention that Fury had ordered him not to cover them. Izuku wonders if Fury would use Heaven on him, if he obeys, or if he'd only use

it as a punishment. Izuku doesn't think it's much of a penalty, really, even though he'd felt so awful afterwards. The thought of experiencing it again is just... Izuku lets his brain hover on it, for a moment, and it both soothes and unsettles him. The thing is, he *wants* to feel it again. There's nothing better, nothing that compares. His suicides and self harm over the past couple of weeks feel like nothing, now, like they can't even come close to the quirk itself.

Izuku doesn't want to think about Fury's quirk, any more. He uses the bathroom, then steps out of it, walking to his desk, where he'd discarded his button down. He pulls it on, wincing as the fabric rubs against his bruised wrist and burned upper arm, but he gets it on just fine, buttoning it all the way up. It's wrinkled and creased from sitting unfolded on his desk all night, but Izuku can't be bothered to care. He puts his vest on over it, but doesn't even bother with the tie. If he couldn't figure it out in the safety of his dorm room, he's not going to be able to figure it out now, in this place. Especially not with the way his hands are shaking, the way his left arm is stiff and sore.

Izuku realizes, as he shoves the tie into the pocket of his slacks, also wrinkled from being slept in, that he has no earthly idea where or when he's supposed to meet Fury. He stands, facing his desk, his hands trembling. He knows he should check the burner phone, see if Fury's texted him, but he doesn't want to open it and see that he's late. He doesn't want to open it and see anything at all.

Izuku forces himself to pick the flip phone up off the nightstand. He opens it, but there aren't any messages. It's just past nine in the morning, which makes sense given that Izuku can see light seeping through the curtain over the window. Just as Izuku is wondering if he should go to the first floor, ask Yamamoto what to do, he hears a knock at his door. Izuku swallows, reaching down and rolling up his sleeves. Fury had wanted to see the burns.

He walks to the door, his steps slow and even. His heart is hammering in his chest like a rabbit kicking frantically at the insides of his ribs. The doorknob is cool when he grabs it, reaching with one hand to unlock the door and using the other to turn the knob. Izuku has no illusions about the sanctity of that lock. Without a doubt, Fury has the key. He pulls the door open, blinking at the light that spills out from the hallway. In front of him, standing with his arms crossed over his chest, is Fury, wearing sunglasses and dressed in a tight t-shirt and a pair of jeans. He smiles when he sees Izuku, and Izuku hates the way just that smile is enough to make Izuku want to slip back into the room, want to shut the door behind him and press his full weight against the door as if that'd keep Fury out.

"Izuku," Fury says, dropping his hands from his chest and reaching one out to touch Izuku's shoulder. Izuku flinches. "Sleep well?" Fury asks, amusement in his voice. Izuku swallows.

"W-Well enough," he says, his voice hoarse from not having spoken yet since waking up. Fury nods, and then he's guiding Izuku out of his room with a firm grip on his shoulder. Izuku swallows heavily as he lets Fury push him along the hallway, toward the elevators.

"You know, I'm actually going easy on you," Fury says as he practically steers Izuku along, stopping him in front of the elevator and pressing the down button. "It's good to get your training out of the way early, or some others might not be so lenient." Izuku bites at his bottom lip, stepping onto the elevator before Fury can nudge him on. Fury follows close behind.

"Others?" Izuku asks, quietly, because he'd gotten the impression that the Gekkeiju was a relatively small organization. Fury nods, looking at Izuku from the sides of his eyes.

"Yeah. My sister, Sumire, and I are essentially the boss's second in commands, but that doesn't mean we're the only ones who outrank *you*," Fury says, then chuckles lowly under his breath. "In fact, aside from Mouse and Angel, you'd be hard pressed to find someone who doesn't outrank you. If you did anything to disobey those people, well, it would be up to them to punish you

accordingly.” Fury shrugs. “As long as you can still complete your missions, anything’s fair game.”

Izuku bites at his lip. “Like torture?” he says, quietly, bitterly. Fury blinks at him, then laughs, tipping his head back.

“Oh, you think *that* was torture?” Fury asks, miming wiping a tear from one eye. “You poor, innocent child,” he says, shaking his head and chuckling. “No, no, you haven’t been tortured. That was just normal discipline when you’re a villain.” Izuku stares at him. The elevator stops on the third floor, the doors sliding open.

“Like I said, Izuku,” Fury says, stepping out into the hallway and heading to the right, to the room they were in yesterday. “I’m going quite easy on you. You should be grateful it’s not worse.” He opens the door, holding it open and gesturing for Izuku to go inside. Izuku takes a steadying breath before he walks into the room. It looks much the same as yesterday, what with the two armchairs and the low table, but one armchair is turned to face the door, and on the table beside it, there’s a white box. Izuku stands beside the door as Fury walks inside. He feels like his limbs are stiff, like he doesn’t have full control over them.

“Sit,” Fury says, nodding his head to the chair facing the door. He turns away from Izuku, not waiting for him as he makes his way over to the coffee table, sitting on the edge just like last time. He pulls the white box onto his lap and opens it. Izuku can’t see the contents, but he feels sick anyway. Izuku walks to the chair and sits down. He feels naked, vulnerable. To his left, Fury hums, holding out a hand.

“Your arm,” Fury says, lightly, and Izuku swallows, squeezing his eyes shut. There’s no cigarette, no lighter, but Izuku is still braced for pain as he sets his left forearm in Fury’s grip. The gap between the arm of the chair and the table is almost nothing, so when Fury scoots the box to the side and rests Izuku’s arm on his lap, Izuku isn’t even stretching. Izuku watches as Fury pulls something from the box, a small packet. He tears it open, and the smell of alcohol permeates the room.

“What?” Fury asks, a smirk on his lips as he rubs the alcohol wipe between his hands, cleaning them. “Not what you expected?” Izuku nods, dully. He watches as Fury sets the used alcohol wipe and its wrapper down on his other side, on the table, beside the box. Fury pulls out another packet, tears it open. He holds Izuku’s arm carefully, and he dabs at the two burns. The pain is nothing, compared to yesterday, and Izuku doesn’t even twitch.

“What are you...” Izuku trails off as Fury glances up at him, an eyebrow raised.

“What does it look like?” Fury quips back, looking back down at Izuku’s arm and frowning. “You didn’t even clean these,” he says, with a sigh. He presses the alcohol wipe more firmly into the second burn, and when he pulls away, Izuku can see a smear of grey ash on the wipe, mixed with pink traces of blood. Fury swipes the wipe over the wounds a few more times, then sets the wipe aside, next to the other one. He clicks his tongue, pulling a tube labelled in English out of the case next. Izuku watches as Fury unscrews the lid to the tube, squeezing a small amount of a yellow-tinted clear ointment onto the tip of his finger.

“If you clean them right away, I won’t have to use alcohol next time,” Fury says as he reaches up, dabbing the ointment onto Izuku’s burns. “They’ll heal better that way, too.” Izuku nods, the movement jerky, quick.

“W-Why are you--why are you doing this?” Izuku asks, swallowing around the lump in his throat. Fury chuckles under his breath, pulling a bandage out of the box and ripping open the paper

covering on it.

“Would you rather I didn’t?” Fury asks as he presses the bandage over the top burn. “You’re important to us, Izuku. We want you to learn, but we don’t want you useless and broken.” He takes out another bandage, opens it, and presses it over the bottom burn. He pulls back, looking up at Izuku. His legs feel warm under Izuku’s arm, and it makes Izuku feel uneasy, but he doesn’t dare pull away from Fury, not after yesterday.

“You’ll have to get used to this,” Fury says, watching Izuku with half lidded eyes, shaded by his glasses. “When you choose to move into the world of crime, there are a lot of gifts. A lot of blessings.” Fury reaches down without looking, sets his fingers on the bruised, swollen skin of Izuku’s wrist. “But there are a lot of things you’ll lose, too. People, for instance,” he says, his lips pulling into a smirk. “The kid the League held onto was pretty smart,” Fury says, tilting his head slightly. “And I know you two were close. I wonder how long it’ll be before he figures out that you’re a traitor, hmm?” He smiles and looks back down at Izuku’s arm, lifting it and turning it over. He clicks his tongue.

“I don’t think there’s much I can do for this, sadly,” Fury says, shaking his head. “It’s what you get when you struggle, Izuku. Remember that.” He drops Izuku’s arm onto the arm of the chair, and Izuku swallows, looking up at Fury as he shuts the box--a first aid kit, most likely--and gathers the wrappers in his hand. He stands, moving to a garbage can that Izuku didn’t notice in the corner of the room, and Izuku stares at him. Izuku knows there’s no way that Fury can possibly know that Kacchan isn’t talking to him right now. *He’s just saying stuff*, he tells himself. *It doesn’t mean anything*.

Except, even when Fury tells him he’s free to go, even when Izuku pulls his sleeves down and makes his way back to his room, gets his stuff, and goes down the elevator to the first floor, Izuku is still thinking about it. *Kacchan wouldn’t think I’m a traitor, right? He would believe I could get out on my own. He wouldn’t think I had to join them*, he reassures himself. He tries not to think about how Kacchan knows about his quirk, to some extent, how Kacchan knows how Izuku is smart and quick and has a good reason to hate the world. He tries not to think about the way Kacchan hasn’t said a word to him other than to tell him to go away since they were both taken.

Izuku tries not to think about it, but the seed is planted in his mind. As he walks down the sidewalk, as he takes the train back to UA, it sprouts and grows. Izuku has no choice. *I have to ask Kacchan myself*.

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The dorms are loud, when Izuku gets back. It’s only about noon, and it seems like every member of 1-A is in the kitchen area, doing something with food or just hanging around. Izuku slips in through the door, wearing a long sleeved shirt and a pair of shorts he’d bought at a shopping center on the way back. The formal clothes were just too suspicious--Izuku will need to plan better, next time.

Regardless of his clothing, all of the eyes in the room turn to look at him when he shuts the door behind him. It isn’t like it’s loud when he shuts the door, but the loud still echoes through the space, and once Jirou turns to look at him, Kaminari and Ashido do too, and that’s enough for Kirishima and Kacchan to turn, and at that point, well, it’s just obvious that everyone’s looking at him. Izuku can’t bring himself to look back at them, can’t make himself meet anyone’s eyes, but thankfully, someone else breaks the silence first.

“Deku!” Uraraka calls from her spot at one of the dinner tables. “Welcome back! How was visiting home?” She smiles at him, and Izuku forces him to return the expression.

“Great,” he says, since he *had* told his friends and his teachers that he was going home for the weekend. His mom had agreed to cover for him, but only if he kept her updated. There’s a loud explosion from the kitchen that makes Izuku flinch, hard, and he watches as Kacchan storms out of the room, stomping up the stairs. Izuku’s heart sinks in his chest.

“Sorry man,” Kirishima says, shaking his head. “I don’t know what his problem is.” He sighs, turning back to whatever the two of them had been making in the kitchen. *It’s me*, Izuku wants to say. *I’m the problem*.

“I-I should go put my stuff up,” Izuku says, instead, holding up the pair of shopping bags he’s carrying. Uraraka nods, and Izuku can see that most of his classmates have already gone back to what they were doing before. Izuku slips over to the stairs, where his childhood friend had just stomped away, and he starts up them without anyone stopping him. It feels like a blessing.

Izuku doesn’t stop on the second floor, though. He keeps walking up the stairs, the rhythm of his feet on the concrete soothing and grounding. It’s nothing like taking an elevator, and getting to the fourth floor feels so quick compared to waiting for the slow rise of the elevator. Izuku steps out of the stairs onto the fourth floor, *Kacchan’s* floor, and he takes a few easy steps and then he’s there. Kacchan’s door isn’t labelled, but Izuku memorized the room chart the day they moved in, because he thought it might come in handy later. Izuku raises the hand that isn’t holding his bags and knocks on the door.

“Go away, Shitty Hair,” Kacchan grumbles back. “I’m not fucking interested in talking about it.” Izuku swallows.

“It’s not Kirishima,” he says, quietly. He hears silence from the room, then,

“Deku?” he says, his voice strange. Izuku nods, then remembers that Kacchan can’t see him.

“Yeah,” Izuku answers. He registers, vaguely, that his hands are trembling. “It’s me.”

“I can’t—I don’t want to fucking talk to you,” Kacchan snaps, his voice choked in a weird way. “Not after what fucking happened.” Izuku swallows, feels dread pool in his gut, cold and icy and heavy.

“Kacchan--” Izuku starts, but Kacchan’s cutting him off before Izuku can ask *why*.

“Go the fuck *away!*” Kacchan shouts, his voice thick with something that sounds familiar, but Izuku can’t identify it. Izuku turns, runs down the hallway. He feels like he’s going to throw up. His vision blurs, going thick and bubbly with tears as he goes down the stairs as quickly as he can. Every impact sends lightning bolts of pain through his wrist, but Izuku doesn’t care. He unlocks the door to his dorm room and shuts himself inside just before the first loud, thick sobs hit. Izuku thinks, absently, that he sounds like a dying animal.

Izuku drops his bags to the floor and sits down with his back to the door. Something about it, about sitting down, breaks whatever semblance of control he’d been holding onto until now. Izuku draws his knees up to his chest and whimpers, feeling heavy, hot tears soak through the fabric of his shorts, but even as he tells himself to get up, to stop crying, to get over it, he can’t hold back the tears.

He feels *wretched*, awful and twisted up inside, because this means that Fury was *right*. Even if there’s no way that Fury knows, no way that Fury could *possibly* know, he was right. Kacchan hates Izuku. Kacchan knows that something happened at the Gekkeiju’s base, when Izuku was captured and nobody came to save him. While Kacchan was getting rescued and having his hand

held by Kirishima (Izuku's seen the footage, of course he has) and comforted by heroes, Izuku was in that tower, getting guns held to his head and having his lungs filled with fire. Izuku is *still* in that tower, even if he's not there in person, not right now. Izuku may as well still be captured. As he is now, he's just a leashed dog.

Izuku sits with his back to the door for too long, he thinks, but when he stands, it still feels too soon. He lurches to his feet, moving like a drunk man as he stumbles to his closet, sliding the door open. His razors are right where he'd left them, in the box where he keeps all of his supplies, inside their packaging. Izuku takes out a new one, not that any of them are old. He sits on his rug, rolls up his sleeve. He doesn't bother to get his first aid supplies out first, because he doesn't care.

Izuku draws a dark line of blood on his left arm, horizontal between the two bandages Fury had pressed over his burns. Izuku fumbles for a moment, finding the black towel he keeps to bleed out on, and he spreads it over his lap, placing his arm on top of it before he keeps going. He cuts another line into his skin, for the second burn. A third, for the bruise. A fourth and a fifth and a sixth for being a traitor, for being useless, for being too weak to get Mouse and Avenging Angel out without selling himself. A seventh, deeper than the rest, just for being himself. Izuku drops the razor to the ground.

He leans forward, sobbing into his uninjured arm and watching blood run down his cut-up bicep, pooling in the crook of his elbow before spilling onto the dark towel. It's not enough to kill him, Izuku knows, but it's still soothing to watch his blood run out of him, in beads and trickles instead of his usual rush and pulse. Izuku feels something that tastes like the peace Heaven gives him, but it doesn't even begin to compare.

Izuku gets why Heaven is a punishment, now.

--

The next morning, when Izuku shows up to training with just him and Aizawa and Shinsou, he has a throbbing headache. It doesn't even *compare* to the pain in his arm, though. Izuku had thought the wrist was done swelling yesterday, except when he woke up this morning, curled up in his bed like he thought that the blankets would stop him from thinking about the reality of things, his wrist looked even worse. It's swollen to the point where he can't actually *see* the joint under all of the puffiness, and even just moving his fingers hurts, an ache that twinges and spreads through the entire bruise. Compared to that, his bicep barely hurts at all. The cuts are a pain he's used to, and it's like the wires in his brain are a little crossed, because the burns feel more like cuts now that they're surrounded by them.

The problem is that Izuku knows there's no way that he's going to be able to wield his knives or punch someone or block hits with that arm. Izuku walks into Gym Beta knowing full well that he can't train today, and he's filled with a kind of hot shame that makes him feel like he's swimming in lava as the door swings shut behind him. Aizawa and Shinsou are already there, talking quietly to each other, but they both turn to look at him with matching blank expressions as he walks up to them. Aizawa narrows his eyes at him.

"We can get started, now that you're both here," Aizawa says, and he looks like he's about to say something else when Izuku shakes his head, looking up at his teacher. Aizawa frowns even before Izuku speaks.

"I-I can't," Izuku says, swallowing. He's aware of the fact that he's going to cry before he's even started, but he still hates the swell of painful tears in his eyes. Aizawa's brows crease, and he moves in front of Izuku, making eye contact with him. Izuku can't handle him being so close, so he takes a tiny step back. He can see Shinsou watching him from the corner of his eye.

“Why not, Midoriya?” Aizawa asks, voice carefully controlled. Izuku swallows.

“Y-You said to tell you,” Izuku says, mouth too dry, “if I was injured.” As he says it, he can see Aizawa tensing up, can see the way he goes carefully still. Shinsou is staring openly at Izuku, something close to shock on his face.

“I did,” Aizawa says, nodding. “Where are you hurt?” he asks, and his voice is firm but not unkind. Izuku thinks he can hear urgency in it, sharp and concerned. Izuku lifts his left arm, pulls back the long sleeve of his sports uniform. He grimaces at the pain as the tight, fitted fabric moves against the swollen joint, and even though he only rolls it up enough to expose the forearm, he feels naked. He hears Shinsou take in a sharp breath, but Aizawa doesn’t react, just looks at his arm with an unreadable gaze.

“Midoriya,” Aizawa says, but he reaches out to grab Izuku’s arm and Izuku flinches so *violently* that he almost falls over. Aizawa jerks his hand back, staring at Izuku as Izuku cradles his arm to his chest, backing away another step.

“S-S-Sorry,” Izuku grits out, hating the way he stutters. Aizawa takes a deep, slow breath, but he doesn’t reach for Izuku again.

“Midoriya,” Aizawa repeats. “You were staying with your mom last night,” he says, and for a moment, Izuku is confused. And then, Aizawa adds, “and this is the second time you’ve had a hand shaped bruise on your wrist.” Izuku freezes, and out of the corner of his eye, he can see that Shinsou is frozen too, like a statue with wild purple hair and wide, tired eyes.

Izuku shakes his head, quickly. “N-No, she didn’t--it’s not her,” he says, immediately regretting his choice of words. Aizawa’s eyes narrow.

“Who, then?” he asks, his voice calm, his tone measured. It doesn’t fool Izuku. He shakes his head.

“I-I can’t tell you,” Izuku whispers. “I--You said I should say if--if I’m hurt,” Izuku says. “I-I don’t want questions, I-I just--” he chokes on the rest of the sentence before it’s out, and he wants to bury his face in the ground when he feels tears start to stream down his face. His chest eaves with sobs that he tries to hold back, and Aizawa takes a step back, holding his hands up like he’s trying to show Izuku he isn’t going to hurt him. His lips are pressed into a thin, grim line, and the worry is leaking through his calm facade.

“Okay,” Aizawa says. “No questions. But I need you to breathe, Midoriya.” Izuku stares at him as he takes a deep breath, big and obvious. “Take a couple deep breaths. You’re okay. Nobody here is going to hurt you.” Aizawa’s voice is familiar, comforting. Beside him, Shinsou nods, taking a step back, but he stays in Izuku’s field of vision, which Izuku is grateful for. He forces himself to suck in a deep, controlled breath, and a tension he hadn’t realized had built up in his chest starts to slowly unravel.

Izuku closes his eyes. He feels the beat of his heart in his chest, a little too fast, and the movement of his lungs against his ribcage. He opens his eyes, stares at the capture weapon wound around his teacher’s neck. Fury would never wear something like that, and the weapon is something familiar to Izuku. His gaze slides to the side, at the matching scarf on Shinsou. He breathes out.

“S-Sorry,” he says, looking up and meeting Aizawa’s eyes. “I-I just freaked out a little.” He gives Aizawa a slight smile, which his teacher doesn’t return. Izuku offers his wrist to his teacher, holding it out. Aizawa glances down at it, his hands still held up.

“Is it alright if I touch you, to examine it?” Aizawa asks, and Izuku nods. Aizawa steps forward slowly, his hands coming down to hold Izuku’s arm by the hand, not touching the bruised area. He rotates Izuku’s arm, pausing when Izuku winces.

“I-It’s okay,” Izuku says. “It--It just hurts, a little.” Aizawa grunts in acknowledgement.

“I’m fairly certain this is broken,” Aizawa says. “I’ll need to have Recovery Girl look at it to be sure, but she has to heal it, anyway.” He releases Izuku’s arm, then looks up at, meeting his gaze. Izuku swallows, and he feels strange when he has to look away. *It’s Aizawa-sensei*, he tells himself. *I don’t have to be nervous.*

“Okay,” Izuku whispers. Even though he isn’t meeting his teacher’s eyes, he doesn’t miss the way his teacher looks him over meaningfully.

As they walk to the infirmary, the strange tension doesn’t fade. Aizawa seems to relax, somewhat, when Izuku’s mom is even more surprised and horrified than he had been, but Aizawa stays close to Izuku--not close enough to scare him, though. Shinsou tags along, too, and Aizawa only tells him to leave once. Shinsou doesn’t leave, and Izuku thinks that means something, but he isn’t sure what. Even as people ask him questions and he’s healed and they send him to rest, Izuku feels like there’s a wall between him and them. It’s something he can’t understand, something he can’t piece together.

Izuku hates it, because it’s just what Fury told him. *There are a lot of things you’ll lose. People, for instance.* Izuku hates that he starts to think Fury might be right about that.

--

That night, when Izuku comes out of his room for dinner, Aizawa is waiting in the common area. Izuku isn’t surprised by it, but when he steps off of the stairs and sees Aizawa rise from the couch with a sigh, walking toward Izuku with his hands in his pockets, Izuku still feels his heart jump into his throat slightly.

“Midoriya,” Aizawa says, quiet under his breath. “I want to talk to you.” Izuku nods, not meeting Aizawa’s eyes.

“I-It won’t happen again,” Izuku says, and he’s going to say more, but Aizawa stops him.

“No, kid, that wasn’t what I wanted to say.” Aizawa sighs. “Thank you,” he says, and Izuku’s gaze snaps up. He makes eye contact with Aizawa, frowns. Aizawa just stares back at him.

“For what?” he asks, his voice small. Aizawa doesn’t react, just answers.

“For telling me,” he says. “I’m glad you felt safe enough to do so.” He takes a deep breath, in and out. Izuku sees the muscle along his neck and shoulder tense, then untense. “Midoriya, if you’re in trouble, we can help you,” Aizawa says. “You don’t have to tell me anything you’re not ready to,” he says, and his lips slip into a slight frown. “But I want you to come to me with any injuries, just like you did today. I don’t care if they’re self-inflicted or from someone else.” He meets Izuku’s gaze, serious. “I’m here to help you, Midoriya. Whatever you need.”

Izuku swallows, nods. “Okay,” he whispers, his voice too choked up for anything more. “I’ll try.”

Aizawa gives him a slight smile, and he reaches a hand out slightly before pausing. Izuku nods, and his teacher sets it on his shoulder, gentle and warm. It doesn’t undo the rock that’s been sitting in Izuku’s gut since Fury first held him still and burned him, but it does lighten it, ever-so-slightly.

Chapter End Notes

content warning: abuse, manipulation, GRAPHIC self harm, references to torture

[discord!](#) it's 16+ now, btw

i promise i'll get to the provisional license exam plotline again soon frankly it's been a hard couple of days stress-wise and i didn't have time to research and write a chapter that follows canon and also this stuff happens first so idk why im justifying it actually but i felt like i needed to

torture makes me feel better okay???

provisional license exam, part 1

Chapter Summary

last time: izuku got patched up by fury, returned home, got rejected by kacchan, and then freaked it in front of aizawa and shinsou

Chapter Notes

NEW ARC FOLKS are you hyped bc im hyped

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

The next day, when Izuku shows up for training, he's half expecting Aizawa to take one look at him and send him back to bed. It's not that he hasn't rested--it's just that he doesn't *look* like he did. When Izuku steps into the gyms, though, a mirror to yesterday, Aizawa and Shinsou both turn to look at him, but it's Shinsou that speaks.

"You good, Midoriya?" he asks, face wearing a lazy, unconcerned expression. Izuku isn't convinced. He's been wondering, about the way Shinsou trailed after him so much yesterday, the way he stuck around while Izuku was healed. Now that Izuku's less... unbalanced, less unsteady, it strikes him as odd. He and Shinsou might be friends, but Izuku doesn't think that Shinsou considers them close.

"Yep!" Izuku says, giving him and Aizawa a bright smile. Even though Recovery Girl had just healed his wrist, not his bicep (and he's so, so glad that people were more interested in making sure he didn't have a panic attack than they were in making him roll a sleeve up a few inches more), he's feeling a lot better for it. It probably helps that he didn't dream of the Gekkeiju at all last night. Not even a little bit. It also helps that Izuku is only a couple of days out from the licensing exam, and the Gekkeiju seem to agree that it's more important to keep his cover than for him to report back weekly. Miura had texted him, telling him to focus on the licensing exam, that he'll have more freedom to complete the mission afterward. His next date to meet with them at the base is two weeks from Saturday, not one, and he's so grateful for it.

Aizawa nods. "Okay," he says, "good." There's something about the way that he just accepts it, the way that Aizawa *trusts* that Izuku is telling the truth that makes Izuku's heart sing in his chest. It helps, because Izuku has something else to tell Aizawa about.

"Sensei," he says, and Aizawa's gaze moves to him instantly. "I think I know how we can convince the Commission that I need a license," he says, voice quick with excitement. "I-I'm toe joint negative," he says, casting a glance to Shinsou, but the other boy just looks confused. "So I do have a quirk, most likely. There's no way to know if I have a latent quirk or one that'll activate randomly. So I do need a license, legally," he says all at once, feeling the smile pull at his cheeks. Aizawa blinks at him, and something in the set to his mouth shifts.

"That's a good point, Midoriya," he says, slipping his hands into his pockets. "I'll bring it up next time I meet with them." The edges of his mouth curl up, slightly. "Between the three of us, I think

there's a fairly good chance they'll let you take it." Izuku grins back at him.

"Also," he says, glancing over to Shinsou, who looks skeptical. "I think I've got an idea for my first super move."

--

On the morning of the licensing exam, Izuku tags along with the rest of the class despite not having received official word on whether or not he's actually allowed to *take* the exam. The bus ride to the testing site is full of buzzing, chattering voices, and it's a bit much for Izuku, really. He's not used to this kind of thing, even though he's been at UA for a full term already. It's getting easier, though, even though Izuku can't get the thought out of his mind that if Kacchan knows he's a traitor, knows he's working with the enemy, it won't be long until everybody else knows, too.

Izuku knows, logically, that he isn't an *actual* traitor. He's working with the villains, sure, but he has no intention of helping them any more than he absolutely has to in order to gain their trust. Izuku is a spy. A plant. Nevermind that the people he's spying *for* have no idea what he's doing. Nevermind that some of them (Kacchan, Nezu, maybe even Aizawa) think that he's spying for the *other side*. Izuku is only working with the villains to save Mouse and Angel and whoever else they have. He's working with the villains because, as far as he can tell, *nobody* knows what the Gekkeiju wants. And Izuku is probably the only one who can figure it out and survive.

It doesn't really make Izuku feel any better, knowing that. When he sees the back of Kacchan's head, the spiky, ash-blond hair he's seen so many times since he was a kid, it makes it worse. He just thinks about what Fury said to him, what Kacchan all but confirmed. Izuku hates it, but he understands. If he was in Kacchan's position, if he saw a quirkless, weak loser get kidnapped and then randomly get free a week later, he'd think they must have made a deal to get out, too. After all, it's what Izuku actually *did*.

"Deku?" Uraraka whispers, and Izuku blinks, turning to look at her. She's one row in front of him and across the aisle, but since he's not sharing his seat with anyone, it's easy to scoot to the edge of the bench style bench seat and be close to her. She tips her head to the side, at the seat directly behind her and therefore right across from Izuku, and Izuku understands immediately.

Shinsou is asleep in his seat, his head pressed against the glass window. His violet hair is squished, and his mouth is slightly open. He's making light, quiet breathing noises that almost sound like whimpers, but what really catches Izuku's eye is the crease between Shinsou's brows, the tightness around his eyes. *He's dreaming*, Izuku thinks. He wouldn't call it a nightmare, just by looking, but it doesn't seem to be pleasant. As Izuku and Uraraka watch, Shinsou's arm twitches where it's resting in his lap.

"Do you think we should wake him up?" Uraraka whispers. "You're the only one who really knows him, but..." She trails off, a worried set to her dark brown eyes, and Izuku understands. He wouldn't want a bus full of kids who were essentially strangers to watch him sleep.

Izuku nods, then turns to Shinsou. "Hey," he says, loud enough to be heard but not loud enough to stand out among the buzz of conversation that permeates the bus. "Shinsou." Shinsou twitches, his nose screwing up like he's smelled something foul, but he doesn't open his eyes. Izuku presses his lips together into a frown.

"Shinsou," he says, a little louder. No reaction. "Hitoshi Shinsou," he says, feeling a spark of something ugly in his chest. Shinsou had never given him permission to use his first name. It seems to work, though, and Shinsou twitches, almost a flinch, then opens his eyes, straightening up at once and blinking. His eyes land on Uraraka, first, then they move to Izuku, where they narrow.

“Did I fall asleep?” Shinsou asks, his nose wrinkling slightly. Izuku nods, the motion small, and Shinsou sighs. Izuku worries at his bottom lip with his teeth, thinking for a moment that he’d made the wrong decision.

“Are you getting enough sleep at night, Shinsou?” Uraraka asks, jumping slightly when Shinsou looks over to her sharply. “Oh! Um, I’m Ochako Uraraka,” she says, smiling and giving him a little wave. “I don’t think we’ve met, but you might have seen me in the sports festival.” Shinsou stares back at her. Izuku prays that he doesn’t snap at her like he sometimes does at Izuku.

“I remember,” Shinsou says, shortly. “Thanks for waking me up,” he says, settling back into his seat.

“Deku did all the work, really,” Uraraka says with a smile, relaxing visibly as Shinsou stops staring her down. “I just noticed that you’d fallen asleep, and I didn’t think it’d be good for your neck to sleep like that for long.” Izuku is grateful that Uraraka offers the excuse, because it solves the issue of someone potentially bringing up the question of why Shinsou looked like he was in pain while he slept.

“Deku?” Shinsou echoes, his brow creasing. “That’s Midoriya’s hero name, isn’t it?” He glances to Izuku, who nods.

“Yeah!” Izuku says. “Uraraka and Kacchan both call me that, for different reasons, though.”

“Hm.” Shinsou grunts in acknowledgement, staring back at Izuku with narrowed eyes. Izuku smiles again, because it feels like the correct thing to do, and then he turns back to the window when neither Uraraka nor Shinsou seem to have anything else to say. The ride to the exam site doesn’t take long after that, and the scenery outside the window blends together. It’s in a city not far from UA, just a little ways outside Tokyo, and as they pull into the parking lot, Izuku finds himself wishing that it were a little further, so he’d have more time to collect his thoughts.

Izuku stays seated when the bus stops, when his friends and classmates start to filter out of the bus, filling the aisles. The brown faux-leather seat is somewhat stuck to his legs, even with the pants of his costume between him and it, so it sticks to his skin strangely when he finally *does* stand up. He and Shinsou are the only ones still on the bus, and Izuku gets the sense that Shinsou is waiting for him to leave. Izuku doesn’t question it--he stands up and walks off of the bus, the shoes of his hero costume making dull thuds on the metal steps as he steps down onto the concrete ground in the parking lot.

They’re far from the only ones here. Izuku can see two other buses parked in the same area as them, with students in various colorful costumes mulling about. It’s a blazingly hot day, which isn’t helped in the slightest by the way Izuku’s costume is long sleeved and has full length pants, but Izuku thinks it’ll be okay once he’s distracted by the exam itself. He can see Aizawa gesture for 1-A to follow him, and the crowd that’s made up of his friends starts to move, shifting toward a large door in the side of the building they’re parked in front of. It looks like an auditorium of some sort, large and round and tall, and Izuku wonders if he’d be lucky enough for it to be air conditioned.

As they walk inside, into blessedly cool air, Shinsou draws even with Izuku, casting a glance at him over his shoulder. Izuku looks back at him, tipping his head to the side slightly. He’s just opening his mouth to ask what Shinsou needs, but Shinsou speaks, first.

“We should stick together,” he says, his violet irises fixed on Izuku, looking through the corners of his eyes. “We’ve practiced together more than anyone else in the class, unless I’ve drastically misunderstood your curriculum. We’ll do better than most.”

"If it's combat," Izuku replies before thinking, and he feels his cheeks heat up slightly when Shinsou raises an eyebrow. "I mean, we can work together either way!" Izuku says, holding his hands up. "But we really only have practice working together with combat situations and stealth, which I somehow doubt is going to come up."

Shinsou shrugs. "It might," he says, his gaze turning to face forward. His eyebrows furrow slightly. "What's going on up there?" he asks, and Izuku blinks, following his gaze. There's a large guy in a military-looking uniform talking to Todoroki and Kacchan, and from the looks of it (and Kacchan's volume), they're arguing. Izuku watches the disdain grow on Todoroki's face, his posture cold and icy, as this stranger leans in, saying something. A girl with short, cropped black hair and the same outfit as the tall guy walks up, saying something to him, and he suddenly stops, looking surprised, and then bows so deeply his forehead smacks the ground. Izuku winces; he can hear it even from here, and it doesn't sound pleasant.

"I... think they have it handled?" Izuku says, but he isn't really sure. Shinsou snorts, rolling his eyes.

"Heroics kids are strange in every school, I guess," he says with a shrug, and Izuku kind of agrees as he watches the two matching students walk away from the UA kids, talking to each other. Izuku sees Todoroki and Kacchan turn to look at each other, and to his surprise, they appear to be having a conversation. Izuku blinks, something in his throat stinging, and he looks away.

"They're from Shiketsu High," a voice from behind them says, and Izuku blinks, turning around to see a boy with shoulder length blue hair and a uniform that matches the others. He smiles at them. "I am too, of course. Good luck out there," he says, and then he's walking past Izuku and Shinsou. Izuku looks back over to Shinsou, who shrugs.

"That guy seemed nice," Izuku says, and Shinsou arches an eyebrow at him. Izuku resists the urge to laugh at it as they walk towards the room where they're supposed to go to have the exam explained to them. Just outside the door, though, Aizawa and a man with bushy blonde hair and a tired expression that rivals Aizawa's and Shinsou's are waiting, and when the two of them approach, Aizawa meets Izuku's eyes.

"Midoriya, a moment?" Aizawa asks, and Izuku blinks, nodding. He assumes the man standing beside Aizawa is from the hero commission. He glances to Shinsou, giving the other boy a shaky smile and a slight nod, and then Izuku turns, walking up to his teacher and the blonde guy.

"This is Yokumiru," Aizawa says, gesturing to the man. "He's with the Hero Public Safety Commission." Yokumiru nods beside Aizawa, shoving his hands into his pockets and looking bored.

"I'm here to inform you that the Commission has determined you'll be allowed to take the licensing exam," Yokumiru says, his voice a low drawl. Izuku blinks, his eyes widening, but Yokumiru isn't done. "You should be aware, though, that the criteria for you to receive the provisional license may be harder to meet than it is for the others," Yokumiru says, "given that we don't actually know which quirk we're allowing to be used out in the field around civilians." Izuku swallows, then nods, a smile still stretched over his face.

"T-Thank you!" he chirps, but Yokumiru doesn't react. Izuku can see that Aizawa is giving the man a dirty look, but he ignores it. "You don't need to worry about it being more difficult," Izuku adds, glancing over to Aizawa and meeting his eyes. "I'm going to pass it no matter what," he says firmly, clenching his hands into fists at his sides. *If I don't, he thinks, I get my second chance a lot sooner than anyone else will.*

“Well,” Yokumiru says, his eyes drooping. “I’d better get inside,” he says, raising a hand to cover his mouth as he yawns widely, the movement stretching and warping his entire face. He walks between Izuku and Aizawa, shuffling forward into the auditorium where the students are, for the most part, waiting. Izuku watches him go, and when he turns his gaze back to his teacher, Aizawa is watching him with a thoughtful look on his face.

“Sensei?” Izuku asks, tipping his head to the side slightly. He feels a prickle of anxiety somewhere in his chest as the thought occurs to him that Aizawa could reach out and grab him at this distance, could hurt him, if he wanted to. Izuku dismisses the thought, though, because Aizawa *wouldn’t*.

“Go ahead, Midoriya,” Aizawa says, gesturing to the door. “You don’t want to miss the announcement of the exam.” Izuku blinks, then nods, but he doesn’t move. Aizawa seems to expect this, because he sighs, his shoulder dropping.

“S-Shinsou and I are planning to work together,” Izuku says, because he knows he’s supposed to say something but has no idea what. Aizawa barely blinks.

“You’ll do great,” Aizawa says. “Both of you.” He pauses. “Midoriya. Can I touch you?” he asks, and Izuku blinks, nods.

Aizawa reaches out a hand, sets it on Izuku’s shoulder. He keeps it there as the two of them walk into the auditorium, all the way until they pass where the teachers are supposed to sit and Aizawa has to separate. The contact is comforting, somehow, and when it’s gone, Izuku misses it.

--

The stadium itself is not, in fact, air conditioned. Izuku can’t find it in himself to be upset about this, given that he’d have to be *extremely* lucky for that to happen, but he’s still not totally enthused. He’s already sweating, beads of liquid forming on his brow, as he squints in the sunlight that filters down into the arena from the blue sky above. It’s a rocky sort of terrain, with cool brown stone and loose dirt and some weird mountain-y shapes. Izuku is pretty sure that they used someone with a quirk like Cementoss’s, but for stone, to make it. There’s a few mock buildings, too, but all of class 1-A (plus Shinsou) are starting outside. Izuku’s just finished putting his last target on, over his heart--he figures it’s a good place to learn to protect, after all. The other two are on the right side of his waist and the front of his right thigh.

“Are you ready?” Izuku asks Shinsou, glancing over to where the other boy is trying to convince the target to stick in his armpit. Izuku is pretty sure they’re not supposed to try and hide them like that, so he doesn’t think Shinsou is going to be successful. His costume is different than the others in that it’s not unique--it’s just the sports uniform with a capture scarf and a facepiece that makes it hard to tell if Shinsou’s talking.

“Ready enough,” Shinsou grumbles, giving up and slapping his final target to the front of one of his thighs, like Izuku had done with one of his. “At least I can actually *use* my quirk for this. There aren’t any robots.”

Izuku nods. “Yeah,” he says, “I’m glad for that, too. Knives work better on people, so.” Shinsou looks at him, raises an eyebrow as his gaze catches meaningfully on the sheaths on Izuku’s belt.

“Are they letting you use knives?” he asks, sounding skeptical more than anything. Izuku nods, swallowing.

“Y-Yeah,” Izuku says. “I guess it’s because quirks like Kacchan’s can be lethal, t-too,” he explains, and Shinsou nods, his lips pulling back in a slight grimace.

“Maybe I should have learned a scarier weapon,” Shinsou grumbles, putting a hand up to rest in his capture scarf. “It’s not like anyone’s going to surrender if I point some cloth at their face.” That startles a laugh out of Izuku, and he shakes his head.

“I-I’m not going to--” he starts, still laughing, when the countdown to announce the start of the exam begins.

“The exam will begin in three. Two,” Izuku bites at his lip, lowers himself into a fighting stance. Beside him, Shinsou does the same. “One. Begin!” the announcer says, and Izuku recognizes the voice as the hero commission guy, Yokumiru, who had given him and Aizawa the news that Izuku could take the exam and had explained the rules of the exam itself. Izuku doesn’t have much time to think about it, though, because there’s suddenly a barrage of balls raining down on them.

“Shit!” Shinsou curses, his capture weapon fluttering out into the air, blocking a good number of the rubber orange balls. Izuku grits his teeth, yanking two knives out of his belt and crouching lower to the ground so that his center, with his targets, is harder to hit. A ball comes flying directly at him, and Izuku slashes it open with his knife before it can touch him, even though it wouldn’t have struck a target. It makes a pitiful sound, like a squeaky toy, then falls to the ground. Izuku can see shiny silver machinery inside, which must be how they can track who threw what. He only feels a little bad for destroying what must be an expensive piece of equipment.

“We’ve got to get out of this area!” Izuku says to Shinsou, shouting so that he can be heard over the sounds of battle. He can clearly hear the roar of flame and the thundering blasts and the crackling electricity of a few of his classmates, and he has no doubt that the rest of them are fighting, too. *Shinsou and I can’t do stuff like that*, he thinks as he starts running away from the area. *We need to get away from the others.*

“Are they targeting UA?” Shinsou asks, his voice a low hiss as they run. Izuku nods his head jerkily, his shoes slapping against the hard earth beneath them.

“I-I think so!” he shouts in reply, reaching one hand up to wipe sweat off his brow. It makes sense, and Izuku wonders why he didn’t expect it--their quirks had been broadcasted nationally, after all. Izuku supposes he’s at a bit of an advantage in that regard, at the very least.

It only takes a moment, once the wind starts, for Izuku to realize it isn’t natural. It starts as a thin breeze that cools the beads of sweat on his cheek, but then it’s too hard and too fast to be anything natural. Izuku’s blinking, and then the wind is too fast to keep his eyes fully open. It whirls around him, and he feels Shinsou’s capture weapon slap him in the face.

“Shinsou!” he shouts, but it’s lost to the rushing of air in his ears, and then there are balls mixed into the maelstrom. Izuku winces, bracing himself and trying to keep his eyes open against the torrent, but it doesn’t matter. He feels a series of smacks all over his body, so many that it’s hard to tell where he’s being hit. The wind is so strong at this point that Izuku can barely feel the balls themselves. It’s odd, because it’s still bright and sunny. The wind isn’t blocking the light, and Izuku thinks that makes sense, but he’s never felt wind like this without there being clouds, in the past.

The wind dies down just as quickly as it started, and Izuku crashed to the ground on his side, blinking in the light. He hadn’t even realized he’d been lifted off of the ground. His skin stings where it’s not covered by his costume, like it’s been rubbed raw, and when he raises a hand to examine the skin there, it looks like he’d fallen in the dirt, little scrapes covering the skin. There’s a few small droplets of blood beading up in the wounds, and Izuku realizes that the wind must have whipped sand and rocks into him. He’d barely even felt it.

Izuku stands up, pressing his hands into the blasted-clean stone to push himself to his feet, and he sways for a moment before his legs remember that he's not in a storm, not any more. He turns, looking for Shinsou, and he sees his friend a short distance away, standing up and looking down at himself with a frown. His capture weapon is missing--it must have blown off completely--and Shinsou's hair has been whipped into even more of a mess than usual. The targets on him, all three of them, are glowing. Izuku blinks, then looks down at himself, a bubble of cold dread building in his stomach despite the heat of the sun. All of his targets are glowing, too.

Izuku hears Shinsou sigh, watches him walk over to Izuku, rubbing the back of his head with one hand. He looks annoyed, but more than that, resigned, his lips tugged down into a frown and his brows slightly furrowed. Izuku looks up at him and swallows.

"Damn," Shinsou says. "I was hoping I'd make it to the second phase, at least." He says it like he doesn't care, but Izuku sees the way he clenches his jaw for a moment. Izuku feels like he's underwater, but not in the distant, measured way he is sometimes. He feels like he's drowning.

"I--" Izuku says, but he stops. He shakes his head. Shinsou's gaze sharpens, his frown deepening.

"Are you--" Shinsou starts, but his mouth snaps shut. Izuku doesn't know why. He thinks he should stay, thinks he should ask about it or ask if *Shinsou's* okay, but he doesn't do that. He turns on his heels and starts walking, quickly, toward where they're supposed to go when they lose. Back into the building that houses the arena, all polished tiles and high ceilings, since it hosts big-name events or something. Izuku feels a pressure in his chest that makes it hard to breathe.

"Midoriya," Shinsou says, and Izuku can hear his footsteps come closer until they're both speed-walking out of the stadium, to the open door for those who have failed. Failures. Losers. Izuku snorts, but it doesn't sound like a laugh, really. He takes in a breath that wheezes in his chest, and he chooses not to see that alarmed look that comes over Shinsou's face when Izuku starts crying, *again*. Izuku's been doing that in front of Shinsou a lot, lately.

"Midoriya," Shinsou tries again, but Izuku shakes his head, picks up his pace.

"I-I'm okay," Izuku chokes out. His voice is high pitched. "I'm just--I'm just a little disappointed," he says, gritting his teeth and squeezing his eyes shut as the air conditioning washes over him.

"Yeah," Shinsou says, and his voice is wary, like he's not sure if he should trust Izuku's word on that. "Me too." Izuku opens his eyes. Shinsou is watching him with a crease between his brows that isn't worry, but Izuku can't identify it.

"I'm going to go find the bathroom," Izuku says. He tries to put a light tone to his voice, but it just comes out strained. Shinsou nods.

"Okay," he says. "I'll be here." Izuku doesn't bother telling him that he won't be, instead turning and heading down the hall. He has no idea where the bathroom is, truthfully, but he assumes it's not in the stadium, which leaves a couple of ways to go. Izuku walks slowly, his boots clicking on the tile. He starts to feel himself becoming distant, like he has been before, but it's not enough to stop him from crying again. His head hurts from holding back tears, his vision blurring. The hallway is too nice for this. It's too nice for Izuku to be walking down it quickly, his face streaked with tears and his costume covered in dust and his hands and face covered in tiny cuts.

He spots the sign for the women's restroom, first, and the men's a moment after that, across the hallway. It's far enough away from the entrance to the stadium that it's quiet, silent except for his own footsteps. He opens the door to the bathroom, and when he walks into the nice, polished

restroom, he is alone. It reminds him of the sports festival in many, many ways when he walks to the last stalls, latches the door shut, and sits on the floor as far from the toilet as he can get. He draws a knife from his arm guards.

Izuku doesn't do it right away, though. He cradles his blade in his hand and sits, the cold seeping from the tile of the floor into the flesh of his thighs. He realizes, as he sits there, warming the blade with the palm of his hand, that he's waiting. He's hoping. As much as Izuku wants to do this, as much as he knows he has to, some part of him is hoping that someone else shows up, like Todoroki did in the bathroom at the sports festival. Like Neito did when he'd taken the pills. Izuku wants someone to come and hold him while he dies. He wants someone to pull him in close and hug him. He wants someone to tell him it's going to be okay.

Izuku should make this quick. He should plunge the blade into the flesh of his neck, should sever his carotid artery, should make it happen as fast as he can, but he can't bear the thought. Izuku slices his left arm open first, not as deep as he knows is best. The blood doesn't pulse out, like most of the time that he does it, now. It rushes out in a neat, steady stream, like the first few times he'd done this. Izuku shifts the blade to his left hand, raises his arm, and cuts a matching slice in his right arm.

Izuku drops the knife to the floor, where it lands with a clatter on the tile. Izuku leans back against the wall and takes a couple of deep, steadying breaths. He can feel the burn of bright pain in each forearm as he waits. And he does have to wait, because he's done a poor job of cutting himself open, and he knows it. He waits, and he listens. He hears his own heartbeat, rushing in his ears as his heart tries to beat faster and faster the less blood he has in his body. He hears his breathing grow quick and swallow and ineffective. He hears the rushing of blood and a strange, dull ringing.

Izuku does not hear the door open. He does not hear anyone call out for him. He does not hear anybody come to help him. By the time he is growing too weak to keep his eyes open, by the time he feels the tugging he knows now is his quirk, starting to yank him away just before he dies, he knows that nobody is coming.

Chapter End Notes

content warning: graphic suicide but what's new

[discord!](#)

i hope you enjoyed!!! im having a good evening even though the day itself sucked ass so im feeling great, watching naruto, and vibing

provisional license exam, part 2

Chapter Summary

last time: izuku and shinsou go to the license exam, izuku is allowed to take it, anddddddd they both get inasa'd and fail

Chapter Notes

hi gamers!!!! this chapter was hard to get done bc today was so busy so sorry that it's one of my shorter ones!!!! i hope u enjoy <3

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Izuku wakes up, blinking his eyes open, to Shinsou mid-sentence.

“--letting you use knives?” Shinsou’s gaze moves to the belt that holds Izuku’s knives, then up to Izuku’s face. He frowns.

“Y-Yeah, they are,” Izuku says, swallowing. Shinsou’s eyes narrow at him slightly.

“Something just happened,” he says. “What was it?” Izuku blinks.

“N-Nothing, I just--I just remembered something,” Izuku says, and Shinsou opens his mouth to reply, his eyebrow raising like it does when he’s about to say something snarky, but he’s interrupted by an announcement.

“The exam will begin in three. Two,” Izuku knows how this goes. He lowers himself into a fighting stance that Shinsou copies. “One. Begin!” Yokumiru says over the intercom, and Izuku turns to Shinsou immediately. He knows what to expect, knows that the other schools will be throwing their balls at the UA students, but Shinsou has no way of knowing that. He sees the look on Shinsou’s face, though, as the balls start to come down on them, and Izuku doesn’t hesitate.

“They’re targeting UA,” he shouts, running in the opposite direction from where he knows the windstorm will be. He doesn’t look back to make sure Shinsou’s following him, because the sound of his footsteps is loud enough even the din of fighting to let Izuku know that Shinsou is close behind him.

This direction leads to a building, tall and closed off, with bars in the windows. It’s not all smooth, though, so when they get to it, it’s easy for Izuku to haul himself up, digging the toes of his boots into a crevice and wrapping his hands around the metal bars. He clambers up to the second story level, his feet balanced on the top edge of the window of the first floor and his hands on a piece of stone that sticks out between the floors, before he glances down. He has a sinking feeling, at first, that this is going to be like with Kaminari, where he strands his friend on the ground, but instead he sees Shinsou manipulating the capture weapon he’s wielding and using it to launch himself onto the roof of the building, ahead of Izuku. Izuku grins, hurrying up the third and fourth floors and onto the rooftop to join him.

“I didn’t know you could scale walls,” Shinsou says, glancing around, standing in a fighting stance, capture weapon threaded between his hands. The sunlight filters through his violet hair, making it look like it’s glowing lavender. Izuku shrugs, wiping dust from his hands on the front of his pants.

“I didn’t know that you could, either,” Izuku says, and Shinsou just raises one eyebrow at him. Izuku takes in their surroundings; it looks like they’re alone on the rooftop, although Izuku can clearly see some fighting taking place where they’d run from, and he can hear something loud going on in the building below them. There isn’t any kind of hatch or door that leads back down into the building, meaning that anybody who approached them would have to come from the outside or bust a hole in the floor. There’s a breeze up here, and at first, when Izuku thinks it, he thinks it’s another windstorm, but he can *see* that, on the other side of the stadium. He bites at his lower lip as he watches it dissipate.

“120 examinees have been eliminated!” Yokumiru announces, and Izuku blinks. He must have missed the announcement last time, distracted by the fact that he’d know he’d have to kill himself. He glances to Shinsou, who’s brow is furrowing, creasing in the center.

“I think it was the guy with the wind quirk,” Izuku says, and Shinsou glances to him, nods. Izuku looks around again. There are other buildings around them, many of them taller, but they’re close enough together that Izuku could easily jump from one to another, if he has a good enough foothold.

“We need to find some people to target with my quirk,” Shinsou says, his eyes scanning the ground below the building. Izuku nods.

“R-Right,” Izuku says. “We could probably travel along the rooftops, but if we do that, we’re less likely to encounter someone.” He follows Shinsou’s gaze, and he sees a group of three people, all fighting each other. There are two girls and a guy, all of them looking on guard. Izuku glances to Shinsou, who smirks slightly at him.

“One for you, two for me,” Shinsou says, and then he’s walking to the edge of the roof. It’s a strange sight, and for a moment, Izuku almost tells him not to jump. In a different place, in a different time, he might have. He looks like Izuku thinks that Izuku himself probably does, on those nights that he jumps from buildings without the intent to survive, limbs stiff and back to Izuku. Shinsou’s capture scarf and hair rustle in the wind, and Izuku sees the other boy pale, taking a step back from the edge.

“Shinsou?” Izuku asks, hesitantly, and Shinsou turns back to look at him, a grimace on his face.

“Uh,” he says. “I’m not as good at getting down,” he says, and Izuku breathes out, nodding.

“Use your quirk on them first,” Izuku says, gesturing below. “I can climb down, and you should be able to follow me, and I can try to catch you if you fall, that way.” Shinsou nods, looking out at the three who are still fighting with one another. He takes a deep breath, then shouts.

“Hey, do you mind if I join you?” Shinsou calls, his voice loud and clear. Izuku sees the three of them snap their heads up to look at him. One of the girls frowns, then shouts back.

“Who the fuck are you?” she asks, and Izuku sees the color, the focus bleed out of her eyes all at once. Shinsou smirks, slightly.

“I dunno,” he says, shrugging, the motion exaggerated. “You guys look easy to beat, so I thought I’d at least let you know before I wiped the floor with you.” The guy starts towards the building,

running at it like he thinks he'll be able to get all the way to the roof, and Izuku is nervous for a moment before he shouts back.

"I recognize you, you're--" and then he stops talking. He stops running, too, arms swinging at his side. Shinsou takes a breath, but the second girl speaks before he does.

"What did you do to them?" she asks, a mixture of alarm and confusion. Izuku doesn't see any marks of Shinsou's quirk on her face, which makes sense. She hadn't actually replied to anything Shinsou said.

Shinsou leans over the edge more than before, shouting at her. "You're pretty hot, babe!" he says, and Izuku cringes at it. "Wanna go out for some drinks after the exam?" The girl screws up her nose, reeling back.

"No, what the fuck are you--" she starts, and then she cuts herself off, standing limply like the other two. Shinsou looks over to Izuku.

"Sorry about that," he says, but he's grinning. "I thought it'd work. Do you want to see my special move?" Izuku blinks, then nods, a smile spreading over his face.

"Yes!" he says, and Shinsou nods, something bright flashing in his eyes. "I didn't think you'd come up with one, though," he adds, and Shinsou shrugs.

"Maka's been helping me," he says, and Izuku blinks. "I can only hold three people for about three minutes, and one person for about ten. I needed some way to restrain people longer than that." Izuku nods.

"I-I see," he says, "so what did you--" Shinsou holds up his hand, and Izuku stops.

"Watch and see," he says, then turns to look down at the three brainwashed students below. "Sleep." he says, and all three of them crumple to the ground in unison. Izuku feels his mouth open slightly, his eyes widening in awe.

"Whoa, you can do that?" Izuku asks. He'd thought that Shinsou could only command people to do basic things, like simple movements and staying still. This was something completely unexpected, something Shinsou'd never done in any of their training sessions with Aizawa.

"Yeah, apparently," Shinsou says, shrugging. "Turns out I can make people do more than I'd originally thought. It takes practice, though," he says, glancing at Izuku out of the corner of his eye. "Are you going to get me off of this building? They won't be out for long, not with how loud it is around here."

Izuku nods. "R-Right!" he says, then hops over to the ledge. A four story building like this is easy for him to climb after all the practice he's had, so he starts shimmying down along the barred windows, the toes of his boots making little scraping sounds in the stone walls. He hops down to the ground after just a few moments, glancing back up to see Shinsou staring down at him, wide-eyed where his toes hang off the ledge. He's backlit by the sun, his violet hair making a halo around his head.

"It's just like climbing a ladder!" Izuku shouts up to him, cupping his hands around his mouth so Shinsou can hear him better. "If you fall, you'll be able to use your scarf to get the bars on the windows." Shinsou nods, the motion hard to see at their angle, but he turns, starting to climb down. It's slower progress than Izuku's had been, but Shinsou makes it down the side of the building without any struggle.

“You know,” Shinsou says as he hops from the last window onto the ground. “You could take out two of these guys. I can always find a second for myself.” Izuku blinks, then shakes his head.

“No, but thank you,” Izuku says, giving Shinsou a smile as he picks up one of the balls scattered on the ground, walking over to one of the sleeping girls. “I want to get at least one out all by myself,” he explains, and Shinsou shrugs.

“Suit yourself, he says, gathering up a ball for himself. Izuku turns away from him, tapping the ball against all three of the girl’s targets. He feels a little guilty when they light up, indicating that she’s out of the game, but he also can’t afford to lose himself, and this is what it will take.

“I’m done,” Izuku says, straightening up. He watches Shinsou nod, moving to tag the guy on the targets, too. When he stands up, it’s with a lazy smirk.

“I’ll see you in round two, Midoriya,” he says, turning. His targets light up and glow red, indicating that he’s beaten the first stage of the test. Izuku gives him a little wave as he walks away, hands slipping into his pockets.

Izuku takes a moment, after that, to make sure that the three sleeping students aren’t anywhere that they could get hurt by accident. He grabs the guy by the shoulders, dragging him out of the open portion of the road and off to the side instead, closer to where the two girls are unconscious. Izuku can feel the stranger’s body heat seeping through the fabric of his uniform, which he recognizes as Shiketsu’s. It feels strangely intimate, dragging someone while they’re unconscious like this, so he doesn’t do anything else, after that, just starts to walk deeper into the mock city.

It’s loud, but not in the same way an actual city is. There aren’t any cars, for one, and there also isn’t a background buzz of birds and bugs in the background, isn’t a chirping of birds along power lines. Izuku glances up, his eyes tracing the sky, and he realizes there actually *aren’t* any power lines. It makes the whole area even more obviously fake, but in the end, Izuku supposes it doesn’t really matter to him.

It’s probably because he’s paying such close attention to the sounds of the mock city area that he hears the lightest of footsteps, near silent behind him. He turns, quickly, pressing his back to the wall of the closest building. Just in time, too--there’s a flash of movement, a swipe of a foot aiming to knock Izuku off of his feet. He dodges it, but only barely.

A girl with long, blonde hair, a Shiketsu uniform, and a lopsided grin stands in front of her, her pale hair swishing with the momentum from her movements. Izuku blinks, raising his fists and sliding away from the wall just enough to lean back if he needs to. The girl grins wider.

“Ooh, you really know how to fight, don’t you?” she asks, tipping her head to the side and clasping her hands together. Izuku frowns. Something about her is strangely familiar, but he knows he’s never met this girl before.

“Who are you?” Izuku asks, dipping into a fighting stance and raising his fists. He doesn’t want to use his knives, not on another student and not if he doesn’t have to. The girl hums, tipping her head to the side.

“Camie,” she says, grinning, and in a flash of movement, she’s *gone*. Izuku blinks, and it’s only because of his months and months of traveling the streets, the months and months of training with Aizawa, that he can sense where she’s moving. He feels the barest hint of wind brush his left arm, so little that he almost can’t feel it through the fabric of his costume. He reacts to the sensation just in time, blocking a high kick with the armguard of his left arm. It sends a shock of pain through the still-healing cuts and burns further up that arm.

“How are you doing that?” he grits out, sliding away from her. It looks like he was smart to give himself the wall--it gives him an entire space that she can’t appear from.

“Do you think it’s my quirk?” Camie asks, tipping her head to the side, grinning still. “It’s not! It’s just how I learned to fight, you see.” Again, she slips away from Izuku’s field of vision, a quick, sliding movement. Izuku clenches his jaw, presses his back to the wall, again, and draws two of his knives from his belt. Camie reappears just in front of him, throwing a punch but stopping short when the light of the sun reflects off of one of Izuku’s blades.

“Oh, you have knives,” she says, her eyes widening and her mouth open in a small *o*. “I can use mine too, then. Right?” she says, grinning, and Izuku feels that sense of déjà vu again, mixed with heavy dread as she produces a small, gleaming switchblade from a pocket in her costume.

“You--” Izuku starts, but then Camie’s rushing forward at him, eyes gleaming. He reacts on reflex, all of his training pouring itself into the way that he doesn’t just dodges out of the way of the knife. He jerks his head to the side as the knife slices at the concrete wall behind him, his eyes darting over to it, catching on the silver shine of the blade, and Izuku strikes out with a knife of his own, twisting his wrist and digging the tip of the blade into the flesh just below Camie’s wrist, along her radius, the bone guiding the blade in a slightly curved, bright red line on her skin.

She slides back, her eyes sparkling with something strange. A cloud must pass over the sun, because it suddenly grows slightly darker where they’re standing as Camie lifts her wrist, placing her mouth over her wound, her tongue darting out to lap at the blood. Izuku watches her face curve strangely with *pleasure*, and he’s struck with a sense of *wrongness*.

“You’re not a Shiketsu student,” Izuku says, and Camie just laughs, her bright pink tongue moving over her arm, turning red-dark with blood. The area grows light again as the cloud shifts away from the bright, early-September sun. Camie’s pale gold hair glitters in the light, and her blood seems too bright, too red. Her laughter is strange, too. Familiar. Izuku has no idea who this girl is, but he knows she’s not normal. He can feel it in the unease that sets into his bones, heavy as it tugs at his heart.

“You’re so smart,” she says, letting her hand fall, swinging at her side. “Do you recognize me, Midoriya? I don’t think I could ever forget you.” Her lips turn up in a bright grin as she lifts the knife once more. “Now hold still,” she says. “I want to taste you bleed.” Izuku presses his lips into a thin line and tries to back up, his eyes widening, but he’s already back to the wall. Camie slashes at him, a quicker motion than last time, and even though Izuku sees it coming, there isn’t much that he can do to stop it. She cuts a thin, shallow cut through the front of Izuku’s uniform. Izuku gasps even though the pain isn’t anything serious, not for him. Blood beads up from the wound, and Izuku winces as he watches Camie bring her knife to her mouth, lapping up the couple of drops of blood there.

“Mm,” she hums, grinning and tilting her head to the side. Her blonde hair falls down like a curtain. “You taste nice alright, but I need more...” She swings forward again, but this time Izuku is faster to react. He slides to the side, then steps away from the wall, ducking forward and striking out with the knife in his right hand. He manages to catch the flesh at the top of Camie’s shoulder. It’s not as good as hitting her hand, but when she jumps back and facing him, knife at the ready, it’s good to not be the only one with an injury.

It reminds Izuku of his fight with Stain and Manami, as Camie makes a noise like a feral animal, deep and raw in her throat, and she rushes forward, slashing with the knife quickly. Izuku blocks it with his arm guard, slipping underneath her arm and slashing upward, digging his knife into the skin of her forearm once more. This time, it works, and the knife falls from Camie’s hand, landing

on the ground with a clatter. Camie's eyes widen slightly, and she looks shocked for a second before she smiles again.

"Aw, you're pretty strong," she says, sliding back as Izuku swipes at her with his knife again. "Is that how you got away from Fangirl and her friends?" She giggles, and Izuku jerks back, feeling his brows furrow.

"What are you talking about?" he asks, holding his knives up and gritting his teeth. *Nobody from Shiketsu should know the names of any of the Gekkeiju, even the ones at the summer camp*. "How do you know that name?"

"Oh, we should play a game!" Camie says, darting to the side, flashing in and out of Izuku's vision. "If I answer a question, you should answer one. It'll be fun," she says, rushing forward at Izuku holding one of the balls from the exam. Izuku had almost forgotten, about that. He dodges back, out of the way, and picks up a ball of his own as he does. If he wins, he'll be able to leave the field and... well, he can't exactly tell someone that there's a villain among the students, partly because he has no actual proof, but also because the only way he knows is that he's technically a villain himself. Either way, beating the first stage of the exam will be something he needs to do.

"You'll tell the truth?" Izuku asks, a plan starting to form and condense in his mind. Camie nods, grinning.

"Only if you promise to do it too!" she says. "I want to get to know you, after all. You're pretty cool." She smiles, leaning back. "You can go first, Deku!" She moves forward, coming at him with the ball in her hand, and Izuku dodges back, frowning.

"What's your name?" he asks. "Your real name." She smiles, something too-sharp to the teeth in her grin.

"Oh, you really are *so* cool," she repeats. "If I tell you, you gotta promise to keep it secret, okay?" She giggles again, and Izuku uses the opportunity to slide to the side, slashing at her with a knife in one hand and a rubber ball in the other. She dodges the knife by leaning back, but Izuku taps the target on the outside of her arm. *Two to go*.

"I won't tell," Izuku says, because he's pretty doubtful that she'll remember his promise in the first place.

"Himiko Toga!" she chirps, smiling. "I don't know if I ever introduced myself before, though," she adds, shrugging. Izuku swallows, gritting his teeth together.

"You're in the League," he says, not a question. Toga doesn't reply either way, just dodges out of the way of Izuku's next slash, jumping into the air and hopping *over* Izuku, moving quickly.

"I guess I don't need to hold back if you know who I am!" she says, laughing. "I think I'm going to keep this look, if you don't mind. I don't have anything to change into." She strikes out at him with a kick aimed at his back, and Izuku can't quite move fast enough to avoid it. The heel of her boot collides with his lower back, and Izuku falls to the ground, catching himself on his hands and knees.

"Oh, it's my turn to ask a question, isn't it?" Toga says, laughing and moving behind Izuku, somewhere he can't see, so he throws himself forward into a somersault, rolling out of her path.

"It is," he grits out, rolling onto his feet, in a low crouch. Toga steps forward, and as she darts out at him, Izuku reaches his ball out, letting her run the target stuck to the outside of her leg into it as

she kicks Izuku's chest. The impact hurts, but Izuku can tell that she's more agility and speed than brute force. That, and he only has to keep going until he gets one more target, and then he wins.

"How'd you get out, anyway?" Toga asks, glancing down at the target glowing on her leg. "Aw, drat. I wanted to get to the next stage, too."

"They let me go," Izuku says, easily. It's the truth, after all, and more than that, it's what the Gekkeiju had wanted him to say.

"But you're quirkless, aren't you?" Toga asks, looking surprised. "I thought that group was collecting people with powerful quirks," she says, tipping her head to the side and holding a finger to her chin. "Unless you're not? Quirkless, that is." She moves forward, a wicked grin on her face, and Izuku slides to the side, letting her run past him. He tries to reach out with the ball and strike her last target, one on her chest, but she grins and grabs his wrist, lightning quick.

Izuku blinks and tries to jerk away, a sudden panic rising in his throat like lightning as he feels a strong hand on his arm. It doesn't matter that Toga is so much thinner than Fury, that Toga is holding his right wrist and not his left, that there's an armguard between her hand and Izuku's flesh. All that Izuku can see, for just a moment, is Fury, lighting a cigarette and smirking at Izuku with half-lidded eyes. For that heartbeat, Izuku loses track of reality completely.

"Huh, that's weird!" Toga says, and she's releasing his wrist, dancing away. Izuku blinks, swallowing as he slides away. He sees that another target is lit up on him, now, meaning that they're both just one hit away from being out of the competition entirely. He feels something prickly and hot sitting in his throat, too, and his heart is thudding in his chest, hummingbird fast and too frantic. Izuku takes a deep breath, steadying himself.

"I-It's my turn," he says, darting forward with the ball in his hand. He keeps his other hand, the one with the knife, guarding the final target, the one over his heart. Toga's last target is on the outside of her left hip, easy to hit but easy to guard. Izuku knows that either of them will have a harder time hitting the other now that they know where they're aiming at, but he has no choice but to continue.

"Go ahead!" Toga chirps, swatting his strike away easily. "I already know what I'm asking." Izuku swallows, takes a step back, then ducks forward. There's another trick he can still try.

"How does your quirk work?" he asks, sheathing his knife and moving the rubber ball to his left hand. His special move requires his right hand, and normally he'd do it with a knife in the first place, but in this fight, hurting his opponent doesn't matter as much as it normally would. He watches Toga's eyes track his movement, the sun shining onto her face and making her eyes shine.

"Easy," she says, smiling. "If I drink someone's blood, I can transform into them. I get their clothing, but if I'm not naked when I do it, my clothes just kind of stay on top, so it's a bit inconvenient that way!" She explains it with a grin, looking cheerful. "Can I ask my question now?" Izuku returns her grin, even though he's sure his is more of a grimace.

"Sure," he says, and then he's rushing forward, moving the ball like he's going to strike her hip with it. Her hands move down, to block the target, but Izuku stretches his right arm out and grabs her by the shoulder. He twists and pulls, throwing her over his shoulder in an easy movement. He slams her down in front of him, reaching forward as she lands, bouncing slightly off of the ground, and he twists her arm behind her back. Normally, he'd level a knife at her throat, but instead, Izuku reaches lower and taps the target with his ball. It glows blue, and his own targets turn red.

"Ow," Toga says, but she's grinning as she turns back to look at him. "I guess you win," she says.

“I’m gonna ask anyway, though. How come you froze up when I grabbed your wrist?”

Izuku smiles despite himself, releasing her and stepping back. “Because you’re not the first person to have done it, Toga,” he says. She rises to her feet, giving him a wicked grin.

“Until next time, Deku,” she says, giving him a salute and turning, walking away. Izuku stands, watching her go for a few moments before he takes a deep breath and starts to move himself toward the area they’re supposed to go when they’re done.

As he walks, feet tapping against the ground, the sounds of fighting all around him and the late summer sun hot on his shoulders, Izuku considers. He considers resetting, doing this all again with his knowledge and without giving Toga anything at all. He considers dying and taking Shinsou up on the offer of letting him tap out two of the students they’d bagged early on, considers doing this the easy way.

But Izuku considers something else. He considers the tension, between the League and the Gekkeiju, when they were fighting over him. He considers the way that, in that short conversation, Toga had given him more intel on the group he’s working with than he’d *ever* had before. He considers her quirk.

As Izuku walks to the area for those who have passed, as his friends greet and congratulate him, he thinks. A plan begins to form in his mind.

Chapter End Notes

content warning: flashback to torture

[discord!](#) it's 16+, please read the rules if u join

POGALICIOUS i love toga she slaps hard also i feel like shinsou was ooc here??? idk
i really really need to reread bnha so that i can make sure im writing them right lmao

provisional license exam, part 3

Chapter Summary

last time: izuku does the first round of the licensing exam again, figures out that camie is toga, and beats her!

Chapter Notes

HI GAMERS SORRY THIS IS LATE i wrote like 99% of it and then simply forgot i hadn't posted it

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

The group of students who have already passed is a lot bigger than Izuku expects, to be honest. He hadn't realized how long he was on the field, fighting, but it's fine with him. When he sees Todoroki, Kacchan, Kirishima, Sero, Kaminari, and Shinsou all in the area, talking with two people from Shiketsu, it makes pride swell in his heart for his friends. Kirishima and Sero seem to be talking to one of the Shiketsu students, a guy covered in a thick layer of tawny hair that obscures any features he might have. The other Shiketsu student, a broad-shouldered man with a jacket hanging off of his back, is glaring daggers at Todoroki. It's Kaminari who spots Izuku first, though, raising an arm and waving.

"Hey, there you are, dude!" Kaminari says, smiling wide. "Me and Shinsou were just talking about you," he says, and Izuku blinks, glancing over to Shinsou as he finally reaches the rest of the group.

"You were?" Izuku asks, glancing at Shinsou.

"Yeah, man!" Kaminari says, leaning forward and nudging Izuku with an elbow. "You're like freaky good in cities, aren't you? You were like that in our final exam, too." Izuku blinks, feeling his face flush slightly.

"I-I'm not that good," he says, raising his hands in front of his face. He knows that the only reason he *is* good in cities is because of what he does as Ace. Having Shinsou and Kaminari pick up on his abilities is a sure way to bring its attention to Aizawa. Frankly, the fact that Aizawa hasn't figured out that he's Ace yet means that Izuku's incredibly lucky. He doesn't want to push it any more than he has to.

"You scaled a wall," Shinsou deadpans, raising a lavender eyebrow. Izuku swallows as Kaminari nods.

"Yeah, and you knew *exactly* where to go during the match with Nezu! It was like you could see the city with your mind," Kaminari says, tapping on the side of his forehead with one finger. Frankly, Izuku can't actually remember what happened on the run through of the final exam that ended up becoming part of the permanent timeline, but it seems that no matter what, Kaminari remembers it too well.

“I-I’m not--it’s not t-that I--” Izuku starts, stuttering, but Shinsou cuts him off, waving a hand.

“Calm down,” he says, rolling his eyes. “We were just thinking that if the second part of the exam takes place in the same arena, we should stick to the urban area. You’d provide a clear advantage.” Shinsou shoves his hands in his pockets, a bored look on his face, but Izuku can tell that it’s at least partially fake. He wonders how obvious he’s being, if Shinsou just knows that Izuku is uncomfortable or if he was able to figure out something more than just that.

“R-Right,” Izuku says, picking at the sleeve of his uniform idly. “Do you think they’d use the same arena?” he asks. From behind him, he hears Iida’s voice answer.

“Of course!” Iida says, and when Izuku turns around, he sees Iida, Uraraka, Tsuyu, Yaoyorozu, and Ashido walking up to them. Not far away, he can see the rest of class 1-A mulling about in the area for those who passed part one.

“It would make sense,” Yaoyorozu says, nodding. “I don’t believe there’s another space large enough to accommodate all one hundred examinees.” Izuku blinks, remembering that only one hundred would be allowed to pass the first part. He opens his mouth to ask how many spots are left, but he’s stopped as a huge blast rocks the area, shaking the ground. Izuku whips around to look back at the stadium, where he sees a number of smaller blasts go off, decimating the field.

“What on--” Kaminari starts, but he’s interrupted by an announcement.

“All one hundred spots have been filled,” Yokumiru says, sounding tired even through the intercom. “The second portion of the exam will be a rescue operation. Professional victims from the Help Us Company will be getting set up on the field. You have ten minutes to rest, and then you will be expected to rescue the civilians.” He sighs into the microphone, sending a crackly, staticky sound through the speakers. “You’ll be graded by points. You start with one hundred, and for any mistake you make, points will be deducted. You’ll fail if you fall under fifty points, so be careful.” Izuku swallows, clenching and unclenching his fists at his sides as the speaker shuts off with a slight crackle.

“It’s like Kamino, isn’t it?” Kirishima says from where he, Sero, and Kacchan are standing, and Izuku turns to look at him. He’s got a solemn look on his normally smiling face. Beside him, Kacchan clicks his tongue and turns, stalking away. Izuku frowns, biting at his lip.

Iida says, “It is, isn’t it?” Izuku glances over to see his friend’s shoulders slump slightly, some of the sun from the stadium spilling into their waiting area and casting a bright line across half of his body. “I wish that we’d been able to do something to help the civilians, at that time. We were so focused on just staying alive ourselves...”

“It was shameful,” Yaoyorozu says, nodding. Her eyebrows pull down towards her eyes, and her gaze drops to the floor. “We have all of this training, we should have been able to--”

“You did the best you could,” Tsuyu says with a firm voice, cutting her off. Izuku watches as Yaoyorozu looks up at her quickly, surprise painting her features. Tsuyu continues, “It doesn’t help to look back at the past as a mistake, ribbit. You have to remain positive and move forward onto the present.” Her gaze shifts to Izuku. “I overheard some of what Shinsou and Kaminari were saying, Midoriya. I think it would make sense if we split up according to who’s good at what, so you should go to the city, ribbit.” Izuku blinks, and then nods, determination filling him.

“R-Right,” he says, glancing around. “Uraraka should come, too,” he says, and he sees Uraraka’s eyebrows shoot up.

“Me?” she asks, pointing to herself, her face looking surprised behind her pink visor. Izuku nods.

“Y-Your quirk would be really good for moving rubble,” he says, “and I don’t think it’d be wise for any of us to go alone. I don’t have a quirk, so that’s especially true for me.” Uraraka nods, holding a fist up.

“Right!” she says, smiling. “I’ll do my best.” Izuku smiles back at her. Out of the corner of his eye, he sees Shinsou shift on his feet, humming.

“I can’t exactly use my quirk either,” Shinsou points out, sighing heavily. “Not on victims, anyway.” His gaze shifts to Kaminari. “You can’t either, right? Electricity isn’t going to be much use here.” He says it matter of factly, not in a rude way, but Kaminari still grimaces, bringing up a hand to rub the side of his head.

“Yeah, no, my quirk is kind of useless in this situation,” he says, his gaze moving to Izuku. “Maybe we should go with you and Uraraka, Midoriya? Both of us have worked with you before.” Beside him, Shinsou nods.

“I agree,” he says. He gestures forward, where Iida, Kirishima, and Sero are all discussing something. “I think other groups are forming already.” He tips his head, glancing at the stadium with a thoughtful look on his face. “They’re probably going to put more victims in the city, anyway. Most of us are more likely to work in an urban environment, so that makes sense.”

Izuku nods. “T-That’s a good point,” he says, biting at his lower lip, thinking. “If we get into trouble, there’ll be other people nearby, so--” Izuku’s cut off by an announcement over the loudspeakers. He blinks as the speakers crackle on.

“Alright, it’s been ten minutes,” Yokumiru says, a sigh in his voice. “Your time starts now.” Izuku swallows, glancing at his group. Shinsou, Kaminari, and Uraraka meet his eyes, and then each others’, and then they’re off.

Getting back into the stadium is more difficult than Izuku would have expected. The rubble is *everywhere*, creating piles where there had been walkways and paths where there had been buildings. Izuku’s glad, at least, that the city is on the outskirts, because it means it’s easy enough for him to hug the outside of the stadium before he leads his group into the mock city itself.

They step into the ruined city at a place where a skyscraper has collapsed in on itself, turning it into a mound of twisted metal and sparkling crystals of broken glass. The sun shines down on it, making it glitter, and there’s a spray of glass and broken concrete chunks that coats the street. What catches Izuku’s eye, immediately upon stepping into the city, is the blood.

It isn’t real; he can tell that without thinking too hard or looking closely. It’s too transparent, too thin. Real blood is opaque and thick in a way that makes it look almost like paint, but this is more like a syrup. It’s spread under the glass and metal remains, streaked along the street, and pooled outside an uncollapsed building not too far from where the four of them stand. Izuku is struck, immediately, by the fact that if this blood were real and it were from one person, that person would surely be dead.

“Okay,” he says, taking a deep, steadying breath. “We need to figure out how many people are in this area, where they are, and how badly they’re hurt.” He glances to his friends, and he’s not surprised to see looks of horror on Uraraka and Kaminari’s faces. Shinsou doesn’t look *scared* or *intimidated*; his expression is more grim than anything else, his lips pressed into a thin line and his eyebrows creased.

“Shinsou, you and Kaminari go and check that building,” Izuku says, pointing them to the uncollapsed building with blood all around the outside of it. “Uraraka, we’ll work on this skyscraper. I think there’s someone underneath,” he says, speaking quickly but firmly. He doesn’t want to see either Uraraka or Kaminari freeze up and lose focus, and he hopes that pairing them up with himself and Shinsou will help them to get into the groove of things. It’s strange for Izuku to realize, but even with all of the emergency situations that 1-A has been through, he’s been through more on his own. It doesn’t explain Shinsou, though. *Why isn’t he scared, too?*

“G-Got it,” Uraraka says, giving herself a little shake. Izuku spares Shinsou one more glance, but when Shinsou nods, purple hair reflecting the too-bright sun, Izuku diverts his full attention to the building beside them.

“We need to be careful about this glass,” Izuku says, grimacing as a chunk of it crunches under his boot as he steps forward. “We could easily get hurt ourselves, or the civilians could be injured.” He moves forward, looking around, but all he sees is blood spatters and their reflections in the shiny, bright glass. He frowns.

“H-Hey,” Uraraka says, cupping one hand over her mouth and raising her voice. “Is there anyone here? We’re here to help,” she says, voice loud and clear. Izuku feels a small smile pull at his lips.

“Good idea,” he whispers, and Uraraka returns his smiles just as they hear a small voice, a child’s voice.

“H-Here!” the boy says, shaky and quiet. For just a moment, it makes Izuku’s heart stutter, before he sees the fake, too-clear blood and reminds himself that this isn’t real. There aren’t any actual victims here. *This kid is a really good actor, though.*

“We’re coming!” Izuku says, picking his way carefully through the glass. A shard pulls at the fabric of his pants, but not hard enough to tear the fabric, and he grimaces. He can see the boy, now that he knows where he is, huddling under an overhang of what must be supporting concrete from the building. The space he’s in is small, with a mound of broken glass piled on top of the concrete, making it precarious. The entrance is almost entirely blocked by bent and torn iron rebar, dark even in the light. Izuku blinks as he sees the boy start to crawl forward, shimmying along the ground.

“D-Don’t move!” Izuku says, and the boy freezes. “Just wait, okay? We’re coming!”

The boy’s face twitches, his lip wobbling like he’s threatening to cry, but he nods, shaky. There’s a trail of that fake blood running down the side of his face, and Izuku wonders if he’s supposed to have a head wound.

“Deku,” Uraraka says, and when Izuku glances back, she’s just a few feet behind him. “How are we going to get him out?” She bites at her lower lip. “The glass--”

“Are you really going to talk like that where I can hear you?” the boy asks, rolling his eyes. They reflect the light of the sun just barely, his face still in shadow. “Jeez, that’s a point deduction if I’ve even seen one. If I was a real civilian, that’s a sure way to make me panic.” Beside Izuku, Uraraka stiffens, color coming to her face. Izuku frowns, looking between her and the boy.

“It’ll be okay,” he says, to both of them, he looks to Uraraka, lowering his voice. “I think we can get him out. If he’s not too injured, I can carry him, and my costume should protect me.” He looks to the boy, raising his voice. “I’m going to come and get you out now, okay? Just hold still and try to stay calm.”

Izuku takes a few steps forward, moving carefully along the field of broken glass. He hasn't had training on rescue situations, not more than a couple of classes--none of 1-A have. The only thing Izuku has to base how he treats the victims off of is how he knows *he* had wanted to be treated, when he was in danger or hurt or scared. All Izuku wanted, when he was scared and trapped and didn't know if he's get out, cream walls growing high around him in the basement, was for someone to tell him that it would be okay and that he would survive. For someone to scoop him up and patch up his wounds and get him to safety. For someone to make sure he wasn't alone, whether he died or not.

Izuku shuffles forward, crouching down to look under the concrete above the boy's body. He casts a glance up, seeing Uraraka standing with her hands at the ready, close enough to float the concrete in an instant if it were to slip. Izuku takes a deep breath, then turns to the boy. It's dark in the shade of the little cave the concrete has made, but Izuku can see blood on the boy's shoulder and head for sure.

"Hey there," Izuku says, giving the boy a shaky smile. "I'm here now, okay? Everything's going to be alright, but I need you to tell me where you're hurt." He can't see all of the boy, not with how narrow the space he's in is. The boy bites at his lower lip, staring up at Izuku with huge eyes.

"M-My head, and my shoulder..." he says, then looks at the ground. "I-I twisted my ankle, too, I think. I was so scared..." He hiccups, raising a hand to wipe at his face. Izuku swallows.

"I know it's scary," Izuku says. "You're really, really brave, okay? Let's get you out of there." He offers a hand to the boy, who blinks up at him and takes it, his skin warm. Izuku tugs him forward a short bit, just enough for Izuku to grasp him under his armpits and pull him out of the rubble, into the sunlight. The boy squints and hisses at the light, shutting one eye. Izuku grimaces, trying to remember what a fireman's carry looks like, when he feels the boy's weight lift off of him.

"I've got you," Uraraka says, her voice firm and confident, and Izuku blinks, turning to see her floating the boy with her quirk, holding onto him by his uninjured arm and leg.

"Good," the boy says, a smirk on his face. "Just a tip for next time, though, any head injuries need their spine cleared before moving them." Izuku blinks, then nods, and the boy seems to slip back into character, looking scared and hurt all over again. Izuku glances around, and he sees a girl off in the distance waving at them.

"You can bring him over here!" she calls. "We've got a first aid station," she says, pointing to an area that Izuku can see is bustling with people. He thinks he sees Sero and Tsuyu there, but it's too distant to be sure.

"I'll go," Uraraka says, giving Izuku a confident smile. "I think I've got a clear enough path, anyway. You should make sure Kaminari and Shinsou are doing okay." Izuku blinks, then nods, turning to head to the building he'd directed Shinsou and Kaminari into. He still has to walk carefully to not send any glass through the soles of his boots, but it seems to go faster now that he's used to it. He follows the trail of bright blood, splattered along the asphalt. It's drying quickly in the sun, and the way it dries is even less realistic than when it's wet--it dries red, for one, not brown. It's strangely comforting, the way it doesn't look real at *all*.

"Shinsou, Kaminari!" Izuku calls, shouting as he gets out of the glass enough to speed up to a jog.

"In here!" Kaminari's voice replies, from inside the building. "We've got it, though!" He sounds a little strained, but after a moment's pause, Izuku decides to trust his friends. He turns, scanning the area with his eyes. On the same block as the building housing Kaminari and Shinsou, he can see a telephone pole collapsed over the road, smashing into a red car. It doesn't look like there's anyone

inside, but Izuku can see people moving on the other side, and he realizes that the car and the telephone are blocking the way to the first aid area to his left. Izuku grits his teeth, jogging forward to get closer.

Upon closer inspection, Izuku is pretty sure that the car isn't a real car at all. There isn't anything where the engine should be, even with the hood of the car twisted and crumpled like paper. He's sure, now, that there's nobody inside--and even if there were, there wouldn't be any point in trying to save them. The cabin of the car is completely crushed, with the thick wooden telephone pole at about shoulder height for Izuku. It casts a shadow on his legs, just above the knee, as he stands, looking over the area.

Izuku knows that he isn't going to be able to move the car or the telephone pole, not by himself. It'd take some kind of strength quirk to do that, which Izuku doesn't have. He glances around, spotting one of the car's doors, thrown to the side and laying on the ground, and it gives him an idea.

Izuku moves to a pile of rubble nearby, a mountain of red brick that was probably once a house. Izuku pulls at the pile, tugging some bricks with him back over to the telephone pole. It's not going to be perfect by any means, but Izuku starts to pile red brick on the ground a few feet from the telephone pole and the car. He moves quickly, sweat running down the side of his face, and soon he has a small pile. He runs back over to the car door, then, picking it up and hauling it up onto a shoulder.

It's surprisingly heavy, but Izuku supposes it's a fairly large door, and it's mostly metal. He moves as fast as he can with it pressing down on his shoulder, and he leans it against the telephone pole, the pile of brick he'd made both raising it up enough that it's tall enough to reach the top of the telephone pole and stopping it from sliding forward to lie flat on the ground. Izuku grits, taking a second to wipe sweat from his brow, then dashes back over to the brick rubble pile. He adds a few to the base of the pile, completing the ramp up to the top of the telephone pole. *Now to do the other side*, he thinks to himself as he tests it, climbing up the bricks and the car door. He reaches the top, standing easily on top of the telephone pole, and he glances down into the surprised eyes of two students he doesn't recognize, one of them carrying an injured old man and the other kicking rubble out of the way with a huge foot.

"Hey!" Izuku says, smiling. "Need a hand?" he says, and the two students look at each other, then back at Izuku with a grin on each of their faces. The one who's holding the old man has short, buzzed blonde hair, and they jerks a thumb to the side at their friend, a girl with dark, curly hair that poofs out around her head.

"I'm gonna have her lift him, with her quirk, and then I'll come to the other side and help you?" they ask, tipping their head and returning their hand to support the man they're carrying piggyback style. Izuku nods, and he waits as the blonde student carefully passes the old man, who appears semi-conscious, to the curly haired woman, who holds him bridal style.

"Up we go," the woman murmurs, her legs growing larger and larger until she's standing even with Izuku, even with him at the top of the fallen telephone pole. She passes the man to Izuku, who takes him, grimacing under his weight. Izuku isn't unfit by any means, but he still goes slow as he turns and inches down his makeshift ramp, not looking up from the ground even as he hears the blonde kid's footsteps as they approach.

"I can take 'im from here," they say, holding out their arms. Izuku nods, passing the old man to them. As he does, he feels something strange tugging at his clothes, coming from the blonde student's hands. *They must have some kind of pulling quirk, like my mom's*, Izuku thinks. The

curly haired girl with the enlargement quirk steps off of the ramp behind him, giving him a smile.

“Thanks for the assist!” she says, dark eyes sparkling. “We’ll get him to the first aid station.” Izuku nods, smiling back at her, and he turns to head back to where he knows Shinsou and Kaminari were, earlier, when he hears a loud crash, not unlike the explosions that turned the arena into ruin in the first place.

Izuku whips around, hearing a loud, cackling laugh and seeing a shockwave ripple out from the center of the stadium. He braces himself, forearms guarding his face as the force knocks sand and dust into his eyes. As the blast fades and he squints into the distance, trying to make out what had just happened, the loudspeakers crackle to life above him.

“Villains have appeared on the scene. You’ll need to suppress them and continue rescue operations at the same time,” Yokumiru says, and then another, familiar voice speaks.

“It is I, Evil Gang Orca!” Gang Orca says, laughter in his voice. “I wonder if you’ll be able to save everyone, even with me here?” Izuku swallows, glancing around. He sees Shinsou and Kaminari jogging toward him. There’s a smear of fake blood on Shinsou’s chest, where he must have carried someone, but Izuku doesn’t have time to ask about that.

“Kaminari,” he says quickly, a little out of breath. “You should go help fight. Your quirk can take out a lot of villains at once.” Izuku shifts his gaze to Shinsou, opening his mouth to speak. “Shinsou, do you think--”

“No,” Shinsou says, cutting Izuku off with a shake of his head. “I’m sure Gang Orca already knows about my quirk. I’ll stay here.” Izuku nods, but the sound of footsteps running up to them distracts him from what he was going to say next.

“Hey!” Uraraka says as she jogs forward, her voice just a little out of breath. “What’s the plan?” she asks, glancing between the three of them.

“I’m gonna go fight,” Kaminari says, his lips pressed into a thin line. “Damn, I’m not looking forward to facing off against the number ten hero, though...”

“You’ll do fine,” Shinsou says, surprising Izuku slightly. “It’s not like he’d fight with his full force against us for the exam.” Kaminari blinks, then nods, a determined grin spreading over his face and his golden blonde hair shining in the sun.

“Right!” Kaminari says. “You can count on me, then,” he says, jerking a thumb at his over chest. He glances in the direction of the explosion, then takes a deep breath. “I’ll be going, then.”

“Good luck, Kaminari,” Uraraka says, and Izuku nods.

“You’ve got this,” he says, and Kaminari nods, looking slightly distracted. He starts off, jogging through the rubble. Izuku watches for just a moment, then turns back to Uraraka and Shinsou.

“We should clear paths to the first aid station,” Izuku says, “and we can rescue people we find on the way. With the introduction of villains, there might be more victims, and we should stick together to be safe.” He pats his belt. “Even if I don’t have a quirk, I can fight.”

Uraraka smiles, raising an eyebrow at him. “Deku, we know you can fight. You’re better at it than anyone else in 1-A, I think,” she says, and Izuku blinks, his eyes opening wide. Before he can reply to that, before he can deny it or question it, though, Uraraka starts forward, jogging in the direction of the first aid station.

“This path is clear, but the one to the east is blocked by a bunch of rubble,” she says, glancing over her shoulder. Izuku and Shinsou start after her. “I think I can lift most of it up, but I’ll need help with some of the smaller pieces if I don’t want to hit my limit.”

Izuku nods. “And one of us can keep watch,” he says, glancing over to Shinsou, who nods quickly. “If any villains approach, we should try to use your quirk to make them sleep, Shinsou.”

Shinsou grimaces. “I can only do that if I can focus,” he says, “so unless I’ve got all of the villains in the area under my control, it’s probably not an option.” Izuku nods, pressing his lips together.

“That’s okay, then,” he says, hopping over a chunk of concrete. “I can fight most people with my knives, but if it’s someone with a quirk like Kirishima’s, it might be difficult for me.” He sees Shinsou nod out of the corner of his eyes as they run into the parking lot that’s been converted into a first aid center. Students move about quickly, using first aid kits and quirks to patch up victims. Izuku’s struck by just how *many* of them there are; there has to be at least fifty victims already in the area.

“Over there,” Uraraka says, gesturing to the east. The path is blocked by grey concrete, streaked in sunlight and crumbled into a heap. They run up to it, stopping just short of it, and Uraraka steps forward, starting to brush dust off of a large chunk.

“Wait,” Izuku says, then cups his hands over his mouth. “Hey!” he shouts, loud enough that he’s sure anyone on the other side would hear him. “We’re about to start dismantling this pile. Is anyone on the other side?” Izuku waits, taking a deep breath and using the back of his hand to wipe sweat from his brow. He feels grit from the dust scrap into his forehead as he does, not painful but present. After a moment with no reply, Izuku turns to Uraraka and nods quickly.

“Good thinking,” Shinsou says as the largest chunk of concrete floats up, wobbling slightly in the air. Little pieces of concrete and concrete dust rain down onto the ground below, but with the largest piece floating, it’s easy for Izuku to see that the pile is really made up of three big pieces, one of which Uraraka is already floating over to the side.

“I’ll start on the small pieces,” Izuku says, reaching down to grab a few chunks. “You keep watch, Shinsou.” Izuku sees Shinsou nod, and he takes it. He starts to throw the chunks of broken concrete to the side, slowly but surely clearing a path. The sun is hot on his back, but he pushes through it.

So far, he thinks the exam is going well, and it’s catching him off guard, to be honest. He steps back as Uraraka floats the second large piece, her brows furrowed in concentration as the concrete lifts off of the ground, then floats gently to the side. Izuku hopes she isn’t pushing herself too much--she’s looking a little pale, but it isn’t easy to see for sure with the pink tint to her visor. Izuku watches as she releases that chunk, pressing her hands together.

“Guys!” Kaminari’s voice startles Izuku, and he whips his head around to see Kaminari running toward them, his hero costume streaked with soot and his blonde hair tousled.

“Are you okay?” Izuku asks, dropping the chunks of concrete he’s carrying and hurrying over to his classmate. Kaminari waves his hand at Izuku, shaking his head.

“I’m fine, but Todoroki and wind dude are fighting,” he says, out of breath. “They’re making things worse, and I can’t do anything without shocking them. You two should go, I can help Uraraka,” he says, his lips pressing into a line. “I think Todoroki will listen to you, Izuku. But you need to hurry.”

Izuku nods, glancing to Shinsou. Shinsou’s brows furrow slightly, and his lips dip into a grimace,

but he turns, making eye contact with Izuku.

“Let’s go,” he says, and Izuku nods, humming in agreement. They turn and run towards the scene of the battle, bright, brilliant flames and twisting, whip-like winds painting the horizon. Izuku swallows as he recognizes Todoroki’s fire and the whirlwind power that had gotten him out the first time through the beginning of the exam.

This isn’t going to be easy, is it?

Chapter End Notes

content warning: uhhh i dont think there's anything

[discord!](#)

if ur reading this ur pog af and i hope ur having a nice day/night. take care of urself!!

provisional license exam, part 4

Chapter Summary

last time: izuku starts on the second part of the exam, which is going good thus far

Chapter Notes

HI PPOGCHAMPS i've done nothing but watch 2 movies and a bunch of naruto today
lolz im so behind on schoolwork

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Izuku can see the fight far before he actually gets to it. Todoroki and the wind kid (he should really get his name at some point) make an equilateral triangle with Gang Orca in a large, cleared area, where the explosion earlier must have destroyed any buildings or features. The wind guy is closest to Izuku, his back facing him, and Izuku can see a lick of flame cling to the edge of his coat for a moment before a sharp turn of the wind snuffs it out.

Todoroki is staring the Shiketsu student down, not Gang Orca, and that's Izuku's first sign that something is wrong with his friend. Todoroki isn't the type to lose focus during a battle, not like this, and from the snarl on his face, the low, angry brows, Todoroki is *furios*. Izuku swallows, unease building in his throat as he glances to Gang Orca. It's funny, because the "villain" in this scenario is wearing much the same expression Izuku thinks that he's wearing; mild alarm and confusion mix with something else on his face. He's wearing a cape and a bodysuit that isn't his usual costume--probably part of the whole "villain" act.

Izuku turns his gaze to examine the space in front of him, where the three of them are facing off. The brown-red stone has been blasted smooth, making a battlefield at least one hundred feet wide. The ground is cracked and split, though, like it's been hit by an earthquake, and Izuku frowns as he scans the area again, because only a quirk could have done something like that here. He spots the person who must be the source not too far away, a head of curly black hair and bare, tanned shoulders collapsed at what looks to be the center of the quake.

Izuku moves forward quickly, sliding among the rock and avoiding the licks of flame and bursts of wind that fill the air as Todoroki and the Shiketsu dude try to fight Gang Orca. He can see a trembling in the collapsed guy's shoulders, which tells Izuku that he's alive, but Izuku's still worried enough to clench his teeth together as he skids to a stop in front of the boy.

"Hey," Izuku says, breathless. "Are you okay? Wait, dumb question." He shakes his head, carefully looking over the person in front of him. "I'm going to get you out of here. Can you hear me?"

The boy does him one better, lifting his head to look up at Izuku with brown eyes. He gives Izuku a shaky smile, starting to push himself up with shaky hands. Izuku moves forward to help him, steadying him as he moves into a sitting position.

“Ugh, sorry,” the guy says, rubbing the back of his head with a twitching, shaking hand. “Gang Orca’s paralysis and my quirk backlash aren’t a great combo, but I’m okay as long as those two don’t blast me to death,” he says, his gaze looking past Izuku, to the battlefield. “You Shindou, by the way,” he says, tipping his head to the side slightly. “You’re Midoriya, right? I saw you on TV.”

Izuku blinks, then nods. “Y-Yeah, that’s me,” he says, casting a glance back over his shoulder as he feels a fiery heat pass over him, a blast of orange-red flame brushing past him. “Um, what happened, with Todoroki and, uh,” he pauses, glancing to Shindou, who sighs.

“Inasa Yoarashi,” Shindou says, his gaze moving to watch the fight still raging behind Izuku. “And I’m not totally sure, but they had some kind of an argument, and now they’re, well, you can see it yourself.” He moves his hand like he’s trying to gesture at the fight, but his arm is shaking too hard, and he drops it with a wince.

“Alright,” Izuku says, taking a deep breath to steady himself. “We should get you somewhere safer to recover,” he says, casting a glance over his shoulder. The way he came is still fairly clear, and it looks like the fight is shifting slightly away from that direction. Izuku should be able to get Shindou back to the street, at least.

“Sounds good,” Shindou says, his tone light hearted but his voice shaking slightly. Izuku wonders if he’s in more pain than he lets on, or if it’s just the effects of his quirk.

“I-I’m going to try and pick you up,” Izuku says, waiting until Shindou nods before he reaches down and lifts up the boy, hauling him up by his armpits. He’s far too heavy for Izuku to lift completely, even with all of his training, and he hisses in frustration as he starts to tug Shindou out of the dip in the ground he’d been collapsed in.

“Sorry, my bones are thicker than normal, so I’m heavier,” Shindou says, sounding apologetic. “It’s part of my quirk, helps to reduce the recoil.”

Izuku nods, not wanting to waste any energy on trying to reply. He looks behind him, watching his steps on the cracked and distorted rock as he backs up, pulling Shindou with him. It’s only after a moment of carrying the other student, sweat dripping down Izuku’s back unpleasantly, when Izuku feels a rush of sharp, strong wind, enough to topple him over. Instinctively, he rolls with the movement, catching himself on hands and knees and putting his body between Shindou and the blast.

Biting wind hits first, then a rush of flame, not directly hitting his skin but enough to scald him even through the fabric of his costume. Izuku bites his lower lip, letting his razor teeth cut a thin line in the flesh as he squeezes his eyes shut and waits for the heat and pain to fade away to a lingering burn. He opens his eyes to see Shindou staring back up at him, dark eyes wide and surprised, and Izuku is grateful he’d thought to guard him. Shindou’s costume is shirtless; he’d have been burned far worse.

As it is, Izuku has been in far more pain than this. He turns, getting to his feet, and it doesn’t surprise him when he sees Yoarashi and Todoroki standing close to one another. Yoarashi is looking down on Todoroki, a scowl on his face as he says something Izuku can’t make out, and Todoroki looks on with a sneer that Izuku’s only seen directed at villains and Endeavor before. Izuku grits his teeth and shouts.

“Todoroki, what the *hell* are you doing?” he screams, his voice raw and angry. He can feel the fresh burns on his back--probably only first degree, but enough to spur him on. “Are you trying to fight Gang Orca, or trying to kill someone?” Izuku asks, watching Todoroki’s eyes widen and his

head turn to look at Izuku, his red and white hair whipping in Yoarashi's wind.

"Midoriya?" Todoroki says, surprise in his voice. His eyes widen again, his brow creasing in worry. Izuku glances down at himself and sees that his costume is charred. For a moment, Izuku feels guilty, for what he's about to say, but he hardens his expression and takes a breath.

"You burned me," Izuku says, his voice loud and clear but controlled, measured. "You burned me, because you were angry and you weren't paying attention to who was in your way." Izuku gestures down and behind him, where Shindou is resting on the ground. "He can't *move*, Todoroki. Would you have been able to forgive yourself if you'd seriously hurt someone because you couldn't see past your anger?" Izuku grits his teeth as he sees horror fill Todoroki's face. Not far from him, something sharp and triumphant grows on Yoarashi's.

"You're just like your father," Yoarashi spits, and Todoroki's face is twisting in anger again as he whirls around to look at Yoarashi. Izuku hisses a frustrated breath out between his teeth.

"I'm nothing like him," Todoroki says, voice rough with anger. He takes a step toward Yoarashi, ice crackling up along his right side and flames lapping at his left.

"Shut *up*, both of you!" Izuku shouts, and both of their gazes turn to him. "This isn't the time or the place."

"I couldn't agree more," Gang Orca says, his voice rumbling from off to the side. Izuku blinks, whirling around, but he's met with a barrage of rocks and stone that he raises his arms to block. He squints around his arms, hearing crashes and yells, and he sees a sidekick villain aiming an outstretched hand at Izuku, firing off another shot of rock and stone and dust. Izuku grits his teeth, stepping in front of Shindou so that none of the shot will hit him. As Izuku braces himself, rock and stone hitting him with bruising force, he hears a horrible, high pitched keening sound that he recognizes as the sonic attack from Gang Orca's quirk. Izuku slips a hand to his belt, and the second the rocks and stone slows to a stop, he flings a knife out at the villain. As soon as he sees it hit, blood spraying from the villain's shoulder, Izuku is whirling around.

"You reap what you sow," Gang Orca says, voice low and full of false laughter. He's pinning Todoroki down, and then there's another wave of fresh, awful sound. Izuku grits his teeth, wincing at it, and he knows even before it fades that Todoroki is paralyzed. He can see Yoarashi off to the side, lying stomach down on the rocks, his face twisted and his limbs unmoving. He looks beyond pissed, but Izuku doesn't have time to deal with his feelings.

He starts to take a step forward, to jump in and help his friends, but he remembers Shindou at the last moment. He glances back just in time to see Shindou shakily pulling himself to his hands and knees. Shindou slams a hand down on the earth in front of him, shattering and destroying the ground behind Izuku. Izuku watches as villains that he hadn't even noticed are knocked over, trapped in the rock.

"I'm okay," Shindou says, giving Izuku a smile before Izuku can even ask. "I'm used to the side effects of my quirk. I can defend myself, even if I'm still numb." Izuku nods quickly, turning and wasting no time in running forward, toward where Yoarashi and Todoroki are frozen on the ground.

He slides along the rock, digging his boots into the earth and gritting his teeth as he tries to move quickly along the unstable ground. Gang Orca is moving toward where Shindou is still stopping the sidekicks, probably to help out his team, but Izuku is between the two of them. Izuku draws a knife from his belt and one from his arm guard, gripping the hilts of each firmly in his palms. His back aches and burns, and the thin cut on his chest from his fight with Toga stings as sweat drips

into it, but Izuku doesn't pause.

"You're not going anywhere," Izuku snarls, and he launches himself at Gang Orca. Gang Orca turns, blinking in surprise as Izuku darts into his space, slashing upward at his stomach with the knife in his left hand. Gang Orca dodges with a step back, something that might be an impressed look on his face.

"Oh, knives," Gang Orca says, his voice lifting a little with amusement. "I forgot that they were letting you kids bring in weapons if they're part of your costume." Izuku doesn't stop as the pro talks; he raises a knee, slamming it into Gang Orca's stomach. It doesn't *do* anything, though, even though it hits; Gang Orca's torso feels like a rock, it's so muscular. Gang Orca laughs, a cackling, mock-evil laugh that Izuku hates.

Izuku can't use his special move on Gang Orca--he knows already that the pro hero is too strong for Izuku to shoulder flip him normally, let alone to twist him around and point his knife at his neck. Gang Orca is also too *large*, Izuku muses as he grits his teeth and dodges a firm punch aimed at his gut. *I'll need to come up with another special move, or at least one that can be used on larger opponents*, he thinks, and then he's moving without thinking.

Gang Orca's arm is right in front of Izuku, still extended from the punch he'd just thrown. Izuku leans forward, sinking his teeth into the meat of his arm. The razors attached to his teeth make the motion both smoother and bloodier than it would usually be, and he hears Gang Orca grunt in pain, trying to jerk his arm back. Izuku's mouth fills with salty, hot blood, rushing out of the wound quickly. Izuku releases Gang Orca, sliding back as Gang Orca does the same.

"Well, I certainly wasn't expecting *that*," Gang Orca grumbles, pressing the hand of his uninjured arm over the wound. Dark blood bubbles out of it, and Izuku spits onto the ground. The already-clotting blood tastes like pennies in his mouth, and Izuku gags a little at the taste. He's used to normal blood by now, but Gang Orca's tastes sharper, more marine.

"Todoroki, Yoarashi," Izuku says, pausing to spit out another mouthful of bloody spit. "Are you conscious?" He doesn't have the time to spare a glance back at them, because Gang Orca is crouching into a fighting stance. *He's taking this more seriously*.

"We are," Todoroki shouts, loud enough for Izuku to hear even as he dodges Gang Orca's kick. "I'm sorry, Midoriya," he says, but Izuku just grits his teeth.

"I am, too!" Yoarashi shouts. "I was being foolish, and it put you in danger. I apologize!" Izuku wants to reply, but he sees Gang Orca open his mouth for a supersonic attack. Izuku drops to the ground, pressing himself into the earth and hoping it puts him low enough, far enough away from the blast aimed at his head. He covers his ears and braces himself, feeling the air warp and vibrate around him.

"Stay down!" Todoroki shouts, and Izuku gladly complies. Even though it wasn't a direct hit, he can feel his body shaking, disoriented from Gang Orca's attack. He trusts Todoroki well enough to not tell him to stay put unless he had a reason to. Izuku stays down, pressed into the earth, as the sound of quick, violent wind and crackling flame whips to life. Izuku can't see behind him, but he sees Gang Orca as the windstorm and the fire collide on top of him, swirling and roaring into an orange-gold basket of flame. Izuku stares at it in awe, the light from the fire burning his eyes.

He's close enough to it that the heat stings at his skin, so Izuku pulls himself to his hands and knees, crawling back out of the way of the flames. He doesn't think he'd be able to stand, not for another minute or so, judging by the faint trembling in his calf muscles. As he turns, he looks up, and he sees Todoroki and Yoarashi facing each other, speaking quietly. They're still both on the

ground, immobilized for the most part, but what Izuku really notices is their faces. Todoroki, who had looked so angry before, his admiration for Yoarashi shining in his eyes, and Yoarashi doesn't look like he wants to curbstomp Todoroki at *all*.

As Izuku pulls himself toward them, he sees Todoroki turn and look at him, his eyes widening slightly. Izuku can see the reflection of the firestorm in Todoroki's eyes, bright and golden and rippling, start to fade as a loud roar fills the air, and he knows what Todoroki will say even before Todoroki speaks.

"Midoriya, behind you!" he shouts, and Izuku rolls onto his back quickly, pulling himself into something that kind of passes for a crouch. The fire around Gang Orca is fading, flickering away and dying, and Gang Orca is dripping with water. *He must keep some on him*, Izuku realizes as Gang Orca's lips spread in a smile.

"Good! But what's next?" he asks, looking down at the three of them. Izuku takes a deep breath, and pulls himself to his feet. He's shaky and uneven, and he *knows* he won't win this fight, but he draws his last knife from his left arm guard anyway.

"Hey, ugly!" A familiar voice shouts, and Izuku blinks. He sees Shinsou and Kaminari climbing up over a pile of rubble. Shinsou has a scowl on his face, his lips pressed together as he waits to hear if Gang Orca will respond.

Gang Orca laughs, turning to face them. He stares at the pair of students, and Izuku realizes that he's not going to reply to Shinsou. Izuku grits his teeth, taking a step forward, but Kaminari meets his eyes and gives Izuku a tiny shake of the head. Izuku pauses, waiting, and then he sees it.

A long, pink tongue appears, seemingly out of nowhere, wrapping around Gang Orca and pinning his arms to his sides. As it wraps around him, glistening in the sun, Izuku sees Tsuyu materialize into view where she's crouched on all fours on the same pile of rubble that Shinsou and Kaminari are standing on top of.

"I've got him, ribbit," Tsuyu says, around a mouthful of her own tongue. Izuku blinks at her, watching as triumphant smiles spread over Shinsou and Kaminari's faces.

"Tsuyu, you were invisible," Izuku breathes, blinking at her as her gaze shifts to look at him. "How...?"

"It's just camouflage, ribbit," she says, wearing a smile around her tongue. "It's my super move." Izuku nods, blinking. Kaminari and Shinsou climb down from their perch on the rocks, and Shinsou jogs up to where Izuku is standing, shaky and weak on his legs.

"Are you injured?" Shinsou asks, looking over Izuku quickly, then frowning, taking a step around to look at Izuku's back. "You're burned," he says, something low in this voice. Izuku is too shaky to turn, too weak to try and hide his injuries from Shinsou. He hates the way that Gang Orca's blast has taken the movement from his legs, the way it makes him so useless.

"I-It's not that bad," Izuku says, stammering. He hears Shinsou hum.

"Did you get hit with Gang Orca's quirk?" Shinsou asks, and Izuku nods quickly.

"Y-Yeah, but not a direct hit," he says. "Todoroki and Yoarashi were hit directly. You should check on them," Izuku explains, and he hears Shinsou grunt in agreement from behind him.

"Hey, you two," Kaminari says, and Izuku looks up to see him supporting Shindou with an arm around the other boy's shoulders. "We should get Todoroki, Yoarashi, and Shindou to the first aid

station,” Kaminari says, his gaze then shifting to Izuku. “Midoriya, you too, probably.”

Izuku swallows. “I-I’m okay, really!” he shouts back. Kaminari opens his mouth, and it looks like he’s about to argue, but the speakers suddenly crackle to life.

“All of the victims have been rescued at this time,” Yokumiru’s voice says, droning and even. “This concludes the examination. If you’re injured, please make your way to the medical area at the south end of the stadium. If you aren’t please change back into your regular clothes and wait. I’ll announce the results as soon as they’re tallied.” Izuku blinks. He’s not sure if it’s relief or regret that washes over him as he realizes that the exam is finished, but whatever it is, it knocks out the strength in his legs as it comes. Izuku starts to collapse, reaching out with his hands to catch himself, when he feels two strong, warm arms catch him.

“Okay, huh?” Shinsou’s voice says close behind Izuku as he hauls Izuku up, pulling one of Izuku’s arms over his shoulders. “Yeah, right.” He wraps an arm around Izuku’s chest to hold him up, and Izuku feels himself flushing in embarrassment as he has to lean on Shinsou for support.

“I-It’s already over,” he says, quietly, and he hears Shinsou hum beside him.

“It is, yeah,” Shinsou says. “Now we just have to hope we passed.”

--

Izuku walks out of the medical tent, grimacing as the afternoon sunlight hits his eyes. Todoroki follows close beside him, a bandage wrapped around his upper arm where a piece of concrete or something must have sliced the skin. The cut on Izuku’s chest has been cleaned up and stitched up neatly, pieces of gauze taped over the injury. Izuku’s back has been cleaned up, and even without a bandage, it doesn’t hurt too badly now that it’s been dressed with a burn cream and he’s wearing a loose sweatshirt instead of his fitted costume. He’s feeling a lot better, too, after the Commission’s medical team had made him take a shower. He’s just glad that he managed to convince them his legs were steady enough for him to change and shower on his own.

Todoroki is similarly cleaned up, dressed in a long sleeved sweatshirt and shorts identical to the ones they’d given Izuku. He keeps looking over at Izuku, though, his eyes darting to the sides and scanning Izuku.

“Todoroki,” Izuku says, softly, and Todoroki’s gaze meets his eyes. “Are you... okay?” Todoroki blinks.

“I’m fine,” Todoroki says, with a soft sigh. “I’m... I’m sorry about what happened, during the exam. I hurt you.” His gaze moves to the side, like he’s looking at Izuku’s back. “I burned you.”

Izuku swallows. “Todoroki, when I was shouting that at you, I--” Izuku starts, but Todoroki shakes his head.

“You were right, though, even if you just said it to get us to focus.” Todoroki says. “I wanted to apologize, but also to thank you.” Izuku blinks, watching as Todoroki looks down at the ground. “You stopped me from becoming the type of person that I hate.”

“Oh,” Izuku says. “Todoroki, you...” Izuku swallows. “You wouldn’t be like him, not even if I hadn’t stopped you.” He watches as Todoroki stares back at him, mismatched eyes slightly widened. Izuku gives him a shaky smile, which after a moment, he returns. Above them, the speakers crackle to life.

“The results have been finalized,” Yokumiru’s voice says, tired. “You will be able to view the

results on any screen in the building.” The speaker crackles with feedback. “Thank you.” It shuts off.

Izuku blinks, turning to Todoroki. “I-I guess we should...?” Izuku trails off as Todoroki nods. They start walking forward, then, moving through the hallway that connects the main part of the building and the medical area that Izuku had been treated in. The hallway buzzes with conversation, sounds of talking that gets louder and louder as Izuku and Todoroki approach a large television screen that’s attached to the wall, like the kind Izuku has seen in airports. Izuku takes a few steps forward, his eyes glued to the screen as names and scores populate it.

Izuku watches as names appear, starting with the most points. Tsuyu is close to the top of the list, as is Yaoyorozu, not that that surprises Izuku. He keeps watching the screen, silently celebrating as more of his friend’s names appear. He watches as Uraraka, Kirishima, Iida, Kaminari, and Shinsou’s names all pop up. He watches as names he doesn’t recognize appear. He waits, his fists squeezed tight together, as names keep appearing, in the low fifties in points.

A red bar appears on screen, and below it, more names appear. Kacchan’s, and Todoroki’s. Yoarashi, too, has failed. Izuku swallows. He waits. Names stop appearing after a certain point. The lowest score on the board is six points, but Izuku’s name isn’t on the board at all.

“Midoriya,” Todoroki says, quietly. “I didn’t see your name.” Izuku swallows.

“I-I--” He takes a breath. “I-It’s not on there.” Izuku tries to take another breath, but it stutters in his throat. He bites down on his lip, his teeth sinking into the cut he’d made on it earlier, with his razor teeth. He tastes iron, sharp and familiar. He feels tightness in his chest. Of course he isn’t on there. What was he *thinking* ? There was never any chance at all.

“Midoriya?” Todoroki asks, his voice hesitant. “Are you okay?” Izuku looks at him, but his vision is blurring. Izuku nods, shaky.

“I-I’m fine,” he says, and his voice sounds foreign to his ears. “I just need to go use the bathroom,” he says, quietly, and he turns and starts to walk to the bathroom that he’d killed himself in before. His head hurts, and it feels like his throat is collapsing in on itself. *Don’t cry*, he tells himself. *Don’t cry*.

“Midoriya, wait,” Todoroki says, and Izuku flinches when a warm hand comes to rest on his shoulder. Izuku stops. They’re just a little way down the hallway, far enough from the screen that the voices are a touch quieter, but it’s not private in the slightest. It’s not close enough to the bathroom for Izuku to be able to throw Todoroki off of himself and run, not close enough for Izuku to be able to get away to reset.

“W-What,” Izuku says, squeezing his eyes shut and feeling tears start to run down his cheeks. “What, T-Todoroki?”

“I’m worried about you,” Todoroki says, his voice clear and concerned. “You’re upset.” Izuku hiccups around a laugh, reaching up one hand to wipe tears away from the undersides of his eyes.

“O-Of course I’m upset,” he says, his voice wet. “I-I just failed so badly they d-didn’t even put my name on the board.” Izuku’s heart stutters painfully in his chest as he says it. *I failed* . He bites down on his lip again, not resisting as Todoroki spins him around so that they’re facing each other.

“It’s okay, Midoriya,” Todoroki says, voice firm. “We’ll get another chance.” Izuku opens his eyes, sees fear and worry and something else on Todoroki’s scarred face.

“Y-You might, maybe,” Izuku says, looking to the side, at the place where the wall and the floor meet. There’s dust gathered there. “But they d-didn’t even want someone like me--they didn’t want a quirkless person to take the exam at all,” he says, smiling bitterly. He licks his bottom lip, tasting salty blood. “I-I just want to be alone,” he says, even though that’s not what he wants at all, even though what he really wants right now is for Todoroki to pull him into a hug and rub his back and tell him that it’s going to be okay. That he doesn’t have to die.

“I--” Todoroki starts, and Izuku looks back at him in time to see him take a slow breath. “What are you going to do, once you’re alone?” Todoroki asks, and Izuku feels his eyes widen. “Are you going to hurt yourself?” Todoroki meets Izuku’s eyes, and Izuku suddenly, viscerally remembers, that Todoroki has held him as he died before. That Todoroki *remembers*, even if it’s just in bits and pieces.

“N-No, I--” Izuku starts, but he stops when his voice cracks. Izuku swallows, fresh tears filling his eyes. He sees Todoroki’s brows furrow, even through the blur of water in his eyes, and Izuku thinks that Todoroki might be about to say something when Aizawa’s voice reaches Izuku’s ears.

“Midoriya,” Aizawa says, and Izuku blinks, turning to the side to see his teacher approaching with Yokumiru at his side. “Are you okay?” His brow is furrowed slightly as he stops in front of Izuku, reaching a hand down to tug Izuku’s chin up. Izuku blinks, surprised, but then he remembers that his lip is bleeding. He licks the blood away, not moving when Aizawa pulls his hand back, straightening up.

“Todoroki, you’re dismissed,” Yokumiru says, and when Izuku looks at him, he seems bored. “Eraserhead and I need to speak with Midoriya alone.” His gaze is sharp when it passes over Izuku’s face, and Izuku doesn’t like the feeling. It reminds him of Fury in how it’s full of something that might be disdain or might be interest.

“Sensei, I--” Todoroki starts, but Izuku cuts him off by reaching a hand up to Todoroki’s where it still rests on his shoulder, squeezing his friend’s hand gently.

“It’s okay, Todoroki,” Izuku says. His voice is still wobbly, but Izuku knows how to suck it up and look okay in front of adults by this point. He’ll listen to whatever this is, and then he’ll slit his own throat in the bathroom. *It’ll be okay.*

Todoroki hesitates for a moment, then he pulls his hand away from Izuku’s shoulder and starts to back up. Izuku doesn’t miss the way Todoroki keeps casting glances back over his shoulder as he goes, though, like he’s checking to make sure that Aizawa and Yokumiru haven’t suddenly decided to attack Izuku.

“Midoriya,” Aizawa says, sighing. “I’m sorry that nobody told you this *before* the results were posted,” he glances over at Yokumiru, anger flashing in his dark eyes, “but your results are being individually by the Commission.” Aizawa looks back to Izuku.

“S-So my name not being on the board wasn’t b-because I wasn’t allowed to pass?” Izuku asks, sucking on his bottom lip, pulling the blood from it. Aizawa nods, then looks at Yokumiru.

“Yes, well, because we don’t actually know what your quirk *is*, and because points are normally deducted for improper quirk usage which obviously wouldn’t happen in your case,” Yokumiru pauses, yawning. “We had to set a different standard for you. In order for someone like you to pass, the Commission determined you would have to end the competition with 75 points or more.” Izuku blinks, swallowing. *Someone like me, huh,* he thinks quietly to himself.

“We set the board to not put your score up, since if you scored between 75 and 50, you’d be in the

passing range on the board but your name would be marked in red,” Yokumiru explains, shoving his hands in his pockets. “Frankly, I think we all anticipated you getting below fifty points anyway.” Izuku sees Aizawa stiffen beside Yokumiru, his eyes narrowing.

“W-What did I get?” Izuku asks. The way Yokumiru worded it implied that he’d gotten over fifty, at least.

“Well, Midoriya,” Yokumiru says, sighing. “You got seventy-five points exactly.” Izuku blinks. “I guess I should say congratulations,” Yokumiru continues. “You’re the first quirkless person to have a provisional license.”

Izuku stares at him, his mouth open slightly. Beside Yokumiru, he sees Aizawa’s face soften slightly, something that might be pride on his teacher’s features. Izuku just feels stunned, like he has emotional whiplash. He blinks, swallowing as Yokumiru sighs, turning.

“I’ll leave you to it, then,” Yokumiru says, shuffling away. Izuku doesn’t watch him go, not for more than a few moments. He takes a deep breath, feeling warmth as Aizawa moves closer to him.

“You doing okay, kid?” Aizawa asks, quietly. He stands next to Izuku, close enough that Izuku could easily touch him if he wanted. “You were really upset a moment ago.” Izuku blinks, reaching up to wipe the leftover tears from his face.

“I-I’m okay now, sensei!” he says, looking up at Aizawa and giving him a watery smile. Aizawa watches him with his usual blank expression.

“You know that the way the Commission is treating you isn’t right,” Aizawa says. It doesn’t sound like a question, but Izuku knows Aizawa well enough to know he should answer. Izuku nods, his head bobbing shakily.

“Y-Yeah,” he says, “I know.” He sighs, looking down at the floor. “It doesn’t matter, though. I won, this time.” He smiles, and he hears Aizawa sigh beside him.

“That you did,” Aizawa says, and Izuku doesn’t have to look up at his teacher to know that he’s smiling too.

Chapter End Notes

content warning: i think just brief mentions of nausea

[discord!](#)

i hope u all enjoyed!!!

start of the second term

Chapter Summary

last time: izuku completed the provisional license exam and got his license! he was very cool and epic and definitely didn't nearly pull an izuku because he thought he'd failed at first

Chapter Notes

drops this in ur lap like its a dead bird and im a cat hi gamers i think this sucks but idc im too tired to fix it

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Sitting in that same seat on the bus, exhausted and sore, Izuku lets himself relax. It's warm on the bus, probably from the vehicle sitting in the sun all day while they took their exam, and the heat soaks through the faux leather seats, seeping into Izuku's sore muscles.

Now that the adrenaline's faded, now that he's finished crying and being surprised and all of that, Izuku is just sleepy. He can hear his classmates chit chatting excitedly around him, but he doesn't quite have the energy to participate himself. Instead, he leans against the back of the seat in front of him and listens, his eyes slipping shut to block out the late afternoon sun that slants through the windows.

He can hear Uraraka and Iida, just a few seats away, talking about rescue. If they weren't so excited, so happy, Izuku might think they were studying for class. Izuku can't make out the exact words, too tired to process them, but he can hear the excitement in Uraraka's voice, the enthusiasm in Iida's.

Further away but louder all the same, Izuku can hear Kirishima and Kaminari making fun of Kacchan for failing, and the responding shouts and growls from Kacchan. Izuku's surprised that there aren't any explosions, but, well, he supposes even Kacchan would have to hold those in on a bus. Izuku wonders, vaguely, if Kacchan would be willing to talk to Izuku if Izuku had failed, too. Izuku's glad, at least, that Kacchan's friends still hang out with him; Kaminari had been so friendly during the exam, after all. *Kacchan must not have told them that I'm a traitor*, he thinks sleepily.

Izuku can hear the rumbling of the bus itself, the vibrations of the tires as they move over the road. The sensation is more tactile than it is auditory; Izuku feels it through the seat underneath his thighs, through the window he's pressed his left side into. He can feel it through his forehead, where it's leaned against the seat in front of him.

And then, he hears a soft voice, from the seat in front of him. It's where Todoroki is sitting, where he's been quietly staring out the window since the bus ride started.

"Do you think we should wake him?" Todoroki asks, voice barely above a whisper. He's so close to Izuku's head, though, that even as sleepy as he is, Izuku can hear him clearly.

"I don't know," Shinsou's voice, quieter across the aisle, says. "He woke me up on the way here, which I was glad for, so maybe we should," he continues. Izuku blinks his eyes open, pulling himself away from the seat in front of him.

"M awake," he mumbles, yawning. "Just tired." He blinks blearily at Todoroki, who's barely an inch from his face. Todoroki swallows, and Izuku can see his throat moving. Strangely, there's a slightly flush on Todoroki's face.

"Oh, good," Shinsou says. "That saves us the trouble." Izuku doesn't look at him, instead squinting at Todoroki.

"Did you get a sunburn?" Izuku asks, frowning and blinking sleep from his eyes. "You're a little red." Todoroki blinks, pulling back and turning to look out the window. Maybe it's the orange-red light of the sunset, but Izuku thinks the redness might grow a little deeper.

"No, this is--" Todoroki clears his throat. "It's not a sunburn. I'm fine," he says, something strained about his voice. Izuku blinks, and he hears Shinsou snort. He glances over to see Shinsou watching Izuku, and when Izuku looks over at him, Shinsou raises an eyebrow at him, as if to ask what he's looking at.

"You're gonna be in our class next term," Izuku says, his eyes opening more as he puts it together. "Right? That's what the deal was if you passed the exam." He looks on as Shinsou nods, a smile on his lips that looks suspiciously genuine.

"Yeah," Shinsou says, looking down at his lap. "I'm going to be in your class," he says, quietly, like he doesn't quite believe it himself. Izuku smiles back at him.

"Good," he says. "You deserve it." Shinsou looks back up at him, blinking for a moment before his own smile widens.

--

When he hears the knock on his door, Izuku has just finished changing. His hair is damp and clean from showering, and he's wearing clean sweats and a long sleeved shirt. The knock is firm and insistent, and just a second later, whoever it is knocks again, even more loudly.

"Coming," Izuku murmurs, moving to the door and turning the lock. It clicks, and Izuku pulls open the door. His eyes feel heavy with sleep, his bones steeped with exhaustion, but that doesn't stop him from startling when he finds himself staring into Kacchan's crimson red eyes.

"K-Kacchan?" Izuku asks, blinking. Kacchan's scowl deepens as he crosses his arms over his chest. He's wearing a tank top and shorts--casual clothes, different from the ones he'd worn on the bus.

"I need to talk to you," Kacchan says, his voice rough and low. Izuku blinks.

"S-Sure," he says, opening his door further. He falters when Kacchan's eyes narrow, his hands clenching at his arms where they're crossed.

"I meant outside," Kacchan says, his voice a low growl. Izuku swallows.

"O-Okay," Izuku says, stepping forward and pulling his door shut behind him. "Let me lock it, first," he says, turning and sliding his key into the lock. He hears Kacchan click his tongue. Izuku's heart pounds in his chest, too fast and too hard, but he knows that he's not going to feel any better until this is over. He's been waiting for this for so long now, waiting for Kacchan to finally,

finally agree to talk to him again. He's not going to mess this up by showing Kacchan just how weak he is.

"Hurry the fuck up," Kacchan says when Izuku pulls the key from the lock. Izuku nods, quickly, hurrying after Kacchan as he turns and stomps down the hallway. Izuku twists his hands in front of him as he walks behind Kacchan. When they step onto the stairs, it's quiet, even though the common room is usually loud this time of night. *Everyone must be resting after the exam*, Izuku thinks. All he can hear is the sounds of his and Kacchan's footsteps and the whir of the air conditioning.

Kacchan leads him through the common area, out the front door. It's a cool, pleasant night, with a soft breeze that brushes over his skin, rippling the fabric of his shirt against his skin. Kacchan doesn't stop, though, even as Izuku tugs the door to the dorm shut behind them and jogs down the steps to catch up to him.

"K-Kacchan, where are we going?" Izuku asks, staring at the back of Kacchan's head. His ash blonde hair is fluffy like it is when he's been washed but when he hasn't put any gel in it, like it was all through elementary school. It makes Izuku feel nostalgic.

"Gym Beta," Kacchan grunts in response, his voice low and irritated. Izuku nods, hesitantly, even though Kacchan surely can't see him.

It only takes them a few minutes to cross campus like that, walking with Kacchan just in front of him. The air tastes damp, like it might rain, and when Izuku tips his head back, he can see dark grey clouds streaking over the sky, blocking the clouds.

Kacchan stops abruptly outside of Gym Beta. Izuku nearly runs into him, stopping himself at the last minute with a sharp inhale. Kacchan's shoulders are tense, his muscles twitching with tension, and Izuku holds back the urge to ask if Kacchan is alright. He knows it wouldn't be appreciated. Instead, Izuku stands there, waiting patiently with his hands at his sides, as Kacchan turns to face him. Izuku takes a step back so they're about three feet apart, instead of barely touching, and he sees Kacchan's eyes narrow at the movement.

"Deku," Kacchan says, but there's no heat to his voice. Izuku swallows, waits, but it seems that nothing else is coming.

"K-Kacchan?" Izuku bites at his lower lip. "What d-did you want to talk to me about?" Kacchan takes a breath, blowing air out his nose and shutting his eyes from just a moment, before looking back at Izuku, his gaze unwavering.

"Hit me," Kacchan says, and even though he says it so clearly, Izuku still wonders if he heard it right. Izuku feels his brows furrow.

"W-What?" he asks, swallowing. Kacchan presses his lips together, grits his teeth.

"I said," Kacchan starts, his voice a growl. "Fucking hit me, Deku."

"I-I--" Izuku shakes his head, takes a step back. "I don't want to hit you," Izuku says. Kacchan's eyes narrow, his lip curling at the edge. A breeze passes over them, ruffling Kacchan's hair, moving the shadows in the pale blonde strands.

"Yeah, well I fucking deserve it," Kacchan snarls, and Izuku feels, suddenly, like he's missed something. He watches Kacchan bite his lip, his crimson eyes turning to the side, and Izuku realizes that his friend is shaking.

“Kacchan, what happened?” Izuku asks, taking a step forward and extending a hand. “Are you okay?” He goes to put his hand on Kacchan’s shoulder, to comfort him, but Kacchan slaps Izuku’s hand away. The sound it makes isn’t loud, but it echoes through the space anyways. Izuku stares at Kacchan, his eyes widening as he sees tears starting to well up in his friend’s eyes.

“Don’t fucking ask me that!” Kacchan shouts, his voice loud and unsteady. “Stop fucking worrying about me!” He takes a step back, his arms uncrossing and his hands swinging down at his sides. His palms are sparking in tiny little golden bursts, the kind that Izuku knows happens when Kacchan is so sweaty that he can’t help it.

“K-Kacchan, I’m s--” Izuku starts, but Kacchan cuts him off, shaking his head.

“No! Don’t *you* fucking apologize to *me*, damn it!” Kacchan shouts, squeezing his eyes shut. “I’m the one who--who--” Kacchan shakes his head, his voice choked and heavy. “I-I’m the one who fucking hurt you,” Kacchan finishes, opening his eyes and staring at Izuku. Izuku stares back, shakes his head.

“No, Kacchan, what--” Izuku swallows. “Y-You already apologized for that, r-remember?” Izuku takes a step forward, but Kacchan just moves back in turn.

“It’s not enough,” Kacchan bites out. “You know damn well that it isn’t,” he says, reaching up to clutch at the front of his shirt. “I hurt you when we were kids, and then you got kidnapped because my stupid ass wasn’t strong enough, and then fucking *All Might* had to retire because of me,” Kacchan spits out, talking like there’s pressure forcing the words out of him too fast. “You fucking--nobody knows what happened to you, in there, you know that?” Kacchan says, shaking his head. His hands spark around the fabric of his tank top. “You can’t even *talk* about it.” He looks up at Izuku, meets his eyes. “And I fucking did that. It’s my goddamn fault,” Kacchan chokes out.

Izuku blinks. “K-Kacchan, I...” Izuku trails off, expecting Kacchan to say something else, but his friend is just staring back at him, eyes wide and wet. Izuku can feel tears starting to well up in his own eyes, hot and sharp, but he doesn’t want them to fall. He knows Kacchan will think they’re his fault. It seems so *stupid* now, that Izuku thought Kacchan thought he was a traitor.

“I hurt you,” Kacchan says, his voice barely more than a squeak. Izuku shakes his head.

“What they--what happened to me, what they--” Izuku pauses, clenching his jaw shut and staring at Kacchan’s hands, twisted in his shirt. “What happened, it’s not your fault,” he says, hearing his own voice crack. “I-It’s not. It’s *their* fault.”

“Who’s they, Deku?” Kacchan asks, fire burning in his eyes. “What happened to you because of my fucking--”

“Shut up,” Izuku interrupts, and he’s just as surprised as Kacchan looks to hear the words. “I-I don’t want to--I don’t want to hear you say it’s your fault, that you were weak or that you messed up, Kacchan,” Izuku says. “I don’t want any of that. I-I wanted you to *talk* to me,” Izuku says, taking a step forward, towards Kacchan. “I thought you hated me,” he adds, voice small. Kacchan flinches back, like he’s been hit.

“What--Deku, you should hate *me*,” Kacchan says, his brows furrowing and his mouth open slightly for a moment before he swallows, his throat bobbing with the motion. “I’ve put you through so much pain for *so* fucking long,” he says, stepping forward. “You--you shouldn’t have to fucking *be* around me. I don’t deserve to be around *you*.” Kacchan’s breath is coming quick, desperate, and when Izuku takes another step forward, he can feel it on his face. Kacchan’s breath is minty, like always, when Izuku stares him down.

“Well, I *want* to be around you,” Izuku says, and Kacchan starts to interrupt, starts to shake his head, but Izuku doesn’t let him speak. “It should be my decision, right?” Izuku says, hearing tears in his own voice. “Kacchan, I’ve wanted you to be my friend, my *real* friend for so long, do you think I’d push you away when you finally *stopped* trying to hurt me?” Izuku’s voice cracks, and suddenly he’s sobbing, too. They’re both crying, fat tears rolling down their faces.

“How do you--” Kacchan raises an arm, scrubbing at his face. “How do you fucking do it, Deku?” He takes in a shaky, uneven breath. “How the fuck are you so good? If someone did that shit to me, I wouldn’t--I wouldn’t be able to just--” Kacchan stops, wrapping his arms around himself. Izuku can’t bear it; he reaches an arm out, sets it on Kacchan’s shoulder. Kacchan flinches, hard, but Izuku doesn’t stop, pulling Kacchan into a tight hug.

“I-I don’t know, Kacchan,” Izuku says, into Kacchan’s shoulder. “I don’t know.” He feels Kacchan’s fingers twisting in the fabric of Izuku’s shirt, scrabbling for purchase as Kacchan sobs into Izuku’s shoulder.

“I-I don’t deserve this,” Kacchan says, so quietly that Izuku doesn’t know if he was meant to hear.

“Deserve what?” Izuku asks, just as quiet. Kacchan breathes into Izuku’s shirt, his breath warm and damp.

“You,” Kacchan says, simply. “I don’t deserve any more fucking chances to be your friend.” Izuku wraps his arms around him tighter.

“You being kidnapped,” Izuku starts, swallowing. “Us, getting kidnapped. That wasn’t--you didn’t do anything wrong,” Izuku says. “That--I don’t need to give you another chance, for that.” The words feel strange. Izuku wonders if he’s dreaming. Kacchan’s breathing has slowed, no longer frantic with tears. Izuku’s crying, still, but not in the painful, awful way. His face is cold where the tears on his cheeks are starting to dry.

“I still think you deserve a punch or two,” Kacchan says, and Izuku blinks, startled. “God knows I’ve hit you enough times. You’ve more than fucking earned the right to hit me.” Izuku pulls away from Kacchan, moving his hands to Kacchan’s biceps. Kacchan looks up at him, something between a grimace and a smile on his face, his tears drying but his eyes still rimmed in red.

“Kacchan, I don’t want to hit you,” Izuku says, and Kacchan snorts. “What?” Izuku asks, frowning. “Why do you want me to hit you so badly?”

“I already fucking explained that to you, Deku,” Kacchan replies, but there’s nothing mean in his voice. He uncurls his hands from Izuku’s shirt, one dropping to the side and the other reaching up, hesitantly. Izuku stands, frozen still as Kacchan reaches up and wipes tears off of Izuku’s left cheekbone with a rough, warm thumb.

“W-What if it wouldn’t make me feel better? What if that would make me feel worse?” Izuku asks, swallowing as Kacchan’s hand lingers for a moment, before he drops it down to his side. Izuku releases Kacchan’s shoulders, then, and they’re just standing, facing each other.

“I don’t want to fucking hurt you, that’s for sure,” Kacchan says, his lips a thin line. “So I guess you shouldn’t.” Izuku nods, shaky.

“O-Okay,” Izuku says. There’s something tight in his throat, something he wants to say but can’t figure out. It’s like his body is telling him to spill, to say everything and finally, finally have someone who knows *everything*, but Izuku knows he can’t. Not with everything at stake.

“What *do* you want?” Kacchan asks, his voice quiet, calm. Izuku blinks, looking back into Kacchan’s eyes.

“I want us to be friends,” Izuku says, firmly. This, he knows for sure. “Real friends.” Kacchan stares back at him.

“Okay,” he says. “I’ll warn you, though,” he says, his lips quirking up into a smirk. “If I’m gonna be your friend, I’m gonna be the best damn friend anyone’s ever had.” Izuku smiles, too, as he keeps talking. “I don’t do fucking anything halfway,” Kacchan says, something bright gleaming in his eyes.

Izuku grins back at him. “I know you don’t,” he says, staring back at his friend.

--

Izuku grins and waves when he sees Shinsou, purple hair bright in the sunlight, walking up the steps to 1-A’s dorm building. Izuku’s been waiting by the door even since Shinsou texted him and said that he was almost there. Shinsou’s in casual clothes, a long sleeved black shirt and a pair of tight jeans, with his backpack thrown over one shoulder. Behind him, he’s tugging a battered brown suitcase, scratches covering the plastic surface. Izuku hurries down the steps, a smile on his face as he approaches his friend.

“Hey, Shinsou!” Izuku says, stopping a few steps in front of Shinsou. Shinsou glances up at him, his face flat.

“Hi.” Shinsou replies, then yawns, covering his mouth with the hand that isn’t tugging the suitcase. Izuku chuckles.

“Stayed up late last night?” Izuku asks, earning him a glare from Shinsou as they start to walk up the steps.

“We’re high schoolers,” Shinsou deadpans. “We always stay up late.” Izuku nods, hopping up a few more steps.

“Is that all you have?” Izuku asks, gesturing to the suitcase. “You know you’re moving in full time, right?” He knows that Shinsou knows that, but Izuku’s honestly kind of hoping that Shinsou has more bags, has more stuff. Izuku doesn’t want to think about how very little Shinsou must own, if this is really his only bag.

“This is it,” Shinsou says, his lips turning down in a slight scowl as he glances down at his suitcase, hauling it up the last step before the door. “I don’t have much.”

Izuku nods, moving in front of him and tugging the door open. He holds it, not speaking, as Shinsou rolls his suitcase into the building. Izuku can see Shinsou’s face twitch, his eyes widening as he glances around.

“Huh,” Shinsou says, clicking his tongue as he stops a few meters into the common room. “They really went all out when they built this.”

Izuku nods. “They really did!” he agrees. He lets the door fall shut behind him as he walks into the room. He can’t help but put a little bounce into his step, smiling and waving at Kirishima and Kacchan in the kitchen.

“Mindfuck’s finally moving in?” Kacchan asks, raising an eyebrow. Kirishima nudges him and murmurs something into his ear that Izuku can’t hear.

“Yup!” Izuku answers. He can see Shinsou squinting at Kacchan, like he’s deciding if he should pick a fight or not. “Let me know you where your room is,” Izuku says to Shinsou, hoping to avoid an argument.

Shinsou nods, and Izuku starts towards the elevator. He’d normally take the stairs, but he doesn’t want to make Shinsou have to carry his things up. Izuku swallows down the panic that threatens to rise in his throat as he presses the button to call the elevator. The doors, painted brown instead of being smooth silver like the ones at the Gekkeiju base, open immediately. Izuku steels himself before he steps inside, holding out one arm to keep the doors open for Shinsou. Shinsou walks in, giving Izuku a quick nod, and Izuku pulls his hand back. He presses the button for the second floor, watching the way his hand shakes hard as he does.

“You’re claustrophobic?” Shinsou asks, and when Izuku looks up at him quickly, his eyes are slightly narrowed, watching the tremble in Izuku’s hands. Izuku swallows, tucking his hands into his pockets.

“I-I just don’t like elevators,” Izuku says, swallowing the lump in his throat. Shinsou nods, grunting in acknowledgement as he looks at the elevator doors again.

Thankfully, only a minute passes before the elevator is beeping, and the doors are sliding open to reveal the far end of the second floor hallway. Izuku lets Shinsou step off of the elevator first, watches as Shinsou’s head turns left and right as he examines the space. Izuku steps off the elevator, sighing in something that might be relief as he places his feet on familiar ground.

“Your room is the closest to the stairs,” Izuku says, walking forward to lead Shinsou through the hallway. “It’s, um, right now to mine, so if you need anything, you can always come knock on my door,” Izuku continues. “M-Mineta used to live there, so I guess they wanted the same rooms to be occupied even if there was a different student. There are other empty rooms, but I’m kind of glad you’re next door to me. It was kind of weird having an empty room next to mine, you know?” Izuku babbles on, stopping in front of Shinsou’s new door and gesturing to it with one hand.

“You’re rambling,” Shinsou says, slipping a hand into his pocket and fishing out a small key, identical to the one Izuku keeps on his keyring.

“S-Sorry,” Izuku says, chewing at the scab on his bottom lip as Shinsou turns the key in the lock and pushes the door open.

“Huh,” Shinsou says, his eyes widening slightly. “It’s nicer than I expected.”

Izuku blinks, nodding. “Y-Yeah, they’re pretty awesome,” he says, following after Shinsou as he walks into the dorm room. It’s the same as Izuku’s was, before he’d moved his stuff in. Shinsou stops in front of the bed, sighing and letting go of his suitcase. He slips his backpack off of his shoulder, setting it on the bare mattress.

“I can unpack on my own,” Shinsou says, his eyes sliding to the side to look at Izuku. Izuku blinks.

“E-Even if you *can*,” Izuku says, tipping his head to the side. “Do you want to? Unpack on your own, I mean.” Shinsou stares back at him.

“I think...” Shinsou turns, glancing at the glass sliding door to the balcony. “I think some company would be nice,” he says, voice quiet. Izuku nods.

“Okay!” Izuku says, smiling. Shinsou looks back at him, offering a tiny smile of his own.

“You can just sit in the chair,” Shinsou says, gesturing to it. “I don’t have much, so this shouldn’t take long.” Izuku nods, taking a seat. He watches Shinsou sigh, raising his arms above his head and stretching, eyes shutting for just a moment, before he turns to the bed. His body blocks Izuku’s view, but Izuku can hear the sound of a zipper opening, and after a moment, Shinsou is pulling out a battered black laptop and an equally battered charger.

“Do you have stuff for your bed?” Izuku asks, leaning on the chair. Shinsou looks up at him, frowning.

“Uh, no,” Shinsou says, glancing to the side. “I didn’t really think about it.” Izuku nods.

“We can go shopping tomorrow after training, if you want?” Izuku asks. “We don’t have any classes or anything until the second semester starts, so we have time. I can let you borrow my extra set of sheets until then, and I think Uraraka has extra blankets,” Izuku says. Shinsou looks at him, frowning.

“I can manage on my own,” Shinsou says sharply. He sets the laptop down on the bare mattress, then reaches into his backpack and pulls out a large plastic bag with a toothbrush, toothpaste, and a bar of soap inside. Shinsou sets it down on the bed as well.

“T-The baths are downstairs, but there are toilets at the end of every hall,” Izuku says, swallowing. Shinsou grunts in acknowledgement. Izuku watches as Shinsou zips his backpack up, then moves to the suitcase, grabbing it and pulling it up onto the bed. He unzips it and opens it up, revealing a mess of different colored fabrics inside. Izuku watches Shinsou take out a stack of what looks like shirts, walking over to his new dresser and opening the second drawer. He sets them inside.

“Shinsou, do you...” Izuku takes a breath. “Is there anything you need, but didn’t bring with you?” He can see, as Shinsou unpacks his suitcase, that the boy doesn’t have many clothes, not at all. Some of the suitcase is taken up by what appears to be laundry detergent, too, and Shinsou seems to not have any shoes with him other than the ones on his feet, which are battered and stained in places with mud and grime. Shinsou looks up at him, something guarded in his gaze.

“I’m fine, okay? You can leave if all you’re going to do is ask stupid questions,” Shinsou snaps, and Izuku swallows, feeling his lips tug into a frown.

“Sorry,” Izuku says, softly. Shinsou looks away from him, continuing to unload the rest of his stuff. Izuku watches, quietly.

He doesn’t ask any more questions about it, not even when it becomes clear that Shinsou has hardly *anything*, but it weighs heavily on his mind, even when he leaves Shinsou’s room to go to his own. He thinks about it before going to sleep that night. *What’s going on?* Izuku remembers seeing Shinsou as Ace, remembers seeing the boy outside, alone and hurt, on his birthday. Izuku wonders what part of Shinsou he doesn’t see, at training and at school. He hopes it’s not any of the many terrible things he’s started to think it could be.

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The opening ceremony is long and boring, but afterward, Izuku is feeling strangely rejuvenated. It’s especially odd, given that Nezu spent most of the ceremony talking about security and the increased threat that heroes in general are under, lately, but Izuku supposes he’s just excited for the start of the second semester. Being at UA at *all* still feels too good to be true, but the fact that he’s already finished his first term is something that makes Izuku’s heart soar and his lips turn up. It doesn’t hurt that Shinsou’s next to him, and Shinsou’s been buzzing with barely-hidden excitement the entire ceremony. It’s the same one that the general studies students attend, but Izuku supposes

that Shinsou must just be excited to be in the hero program's section.

Izuku's smile doesn't fade when he sees Neito approaching him, his hands tucked into the pants pockets of his uniform. He's got a lazy smirk on his face, blue eyes half narrowed as he walks up to Izuku. Next to him, Kendou has a wary look on her face. She glances between Neito and Izuku, like she's trying to figure them out.

"Hey, Izuku," Neito says, stopping and leaning on one leg. "Ready for the next semester?" Izuku nods, grinning brightly.

"Y-Yeah!" Izuku says. He can feel Shinsou giving him a strange look from beside him, but Izuku ignores it.

"Wait, you two are on a first name basis?" Kendou asks, blinking and folding her arms over her chest. "When did that happen?" Izuku blinks, glancing to Neito. He doesn't know Kendou well enough to answer her himself.

"When we both agreed to it, of course," Neito says, shrugging. Kendou scowls next to him, her blue eyes narrowing.

"Yeah, okay," she says, her gaze turning to Izuku. "Do you mind telling me what exactly happened at the training camp? The only thing Monoma will tell me is that you two 'bonded,'" she says, making air quotes, "and now you two are best buddies?"

"They're probably fucking," Shinsou deadpans from beside Izuku, and Izuku blinks, spluttering as his face turns bright red. Neito just blink, then tips his head back, cackling and folding his arms over his stomach.

"Oh, that's a good one," Neito says, miming wiping a tear away from one eye. He looks at Izuku, a grin on his face. "We just had a very touching, bonding moment fighting a villain together. Isn't that right, Izuku?"

Izuku nods, hesitantly. "Y-Yeah," he says, his face still red. "W-We bonded. Over a completely ordinary fight with a villain."

"Our quirks work well together," Neito says, shrugging, and Izuku thinks he might actually have a heart attack from this conversation. Next to him, Kendou squints at Neito.

"He doesn't *have* one," she points out. "And you copy quirks. How exactly does that work well together?" Kendou taps her foot against the concrete ground.

Neito shrugs. "Sounds like a perfect match to me," he says, flipping his hair out of his face. "I've heard that our classes will be going against each other at some point this semester," he says, ignoring the way Kendou frowns at the change in subject. "I should probably warn you that I'm going to smash you inferior 1-A insects into the ground," he says, an evil smile growing on his face. Izuku grins, nodding.

"I won't hold back either, you know," Izuku says, and Kendou sighs, putting her face in her hands.

"You two don't make any sense," she says, her voice muffled by her palms. "Shinsou, is Midoriya always like this? Or has my friend corrupted him?" Shinsou snorts, raising an eyebrow.

"I don't know about him," Shinsou says, waving a hand at Neito, "but Midoriya has never made any sense." Izuku blinks, frowning.

“W-Wait, what does that mean?” Izuku asks, and Shinsou just arches an eyebrow at him. Neito snorts.

“They’re just jealous, Izuku,” Neito says, leaning in with a hand to his mouth like he’s whispering, but he talks at full volume. “They wish they knew all of our little secrets.” Izuku blinks, opening his mouth to respond, but Kendou breathes out sharply through her nose and grabs the back of Neito’s shirt.

“Okay, that’s it,” Kendou says. “You’re messing with us, Monoma. Come on, we should get back to the dorms. The others are probably waiting.” She tugs at Neito’s collar, starting to drag him away. He doesn’t really protest, just flails his arms a little and looks offended.

“Bye, Neito, Kendou!” Izuku says, waving. Neito grins and waves back at Izuku, digging his feet into the ground to make it harder on Kendou.

“Goodbye, Midoriya,” Kendou says, glancing back at him. “I’m going to figure out what on earth is going on between you two, one of these days!” she calls back at him as she keeps walking away. Izuku swallows as he watches her go, a smile still pinned to his face. He hopes she doesn’t look *too* deeply into he and Neito’s friendship.

“Yeah, that whole situation is confusing as hell,” Shinsou says, voice flat. “You just make friends with every single unhinged person you come across, don’t you.” It’s phrased like a statement, not a question. Izuku feels his face heat up and he turns to Shinsou, frowning.

“I-I don’t do that! A-And my friends aren’t unhinged,” he says, watching as Shinsou slowly raises an eyebrow.

“Bakugou, Todoroki, Monoma,” Shinsou says, ticking up fingers on his hand as he lists them, hesitating for a moment before he adds, “and me. You’ve basically collected all of the crazy people in our year, congrats.”

Izuku squints at him. “You’re not crazy,” he says, and Shinsou sighs, rolling his eyes.

“Sure, and Aizawa doesn’t have a sleeping disorder,” Shinsou says. “Whatever. Let’s go back to the dorms, I need a nap,” Shinsou says, turning and walking back toward the dorms. Izuku blinks, hurrying to follow after Shinsou.

“Y-You consider me a friend?” he asks, hesitant and quiet. Shinsou glances back at him, arching an eyebrow.

“That’s what I said, isn’t it?” Shinsou asks, his gaze moving to something far away, something beyond Izuku. “If you’re okay with that, anyway.”

“Of course!” Izuku says, a smile splitting his face. “I told you way back at the sports festival that I wanted to be friends.” Shinsou blinks at him, then turns to face forward again. Izuku can see the faintest hint of a smile on his lips, even at this angle.

“You did say that,” Shinsou says.

Chapter End Notes

[discord!](#)

i hope you enjoyed!! hopefully this didn't suck as bad as i think it does dkjfhdkfj

offers

Chapter Summary

last time: izuku helped shinsou move in, went to the opening ceremony, and made up with kacchan

Chapter Notes

HI GAMERS sorry if this one feels like filler i pinkie promise that it isn't, i needed to establish some stuff and rn we're kind of between arcs

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Izuku is almost back to the dorm building when he feels a warm hand come down on his shoulder. He jumps, a little squeak of surprise escaping his lips, and he sees Shinsou give him a strange look as he turns to look behind him. Izuku relaxes a ration when he recognizes Mirio, his blue eyes shining and a smile on his face.

“Sorry if I startled you, Deku!” Mirio says, pulling his hand away.

“I-It’s fine!” Izuku says, returning Mirio’s smile. “I just didn’t see you there.” Mirio nods, looking to the side at Shinsou, who’s eyeing Mirio with something that looks vaguely like distrust.

“Oh, I’m Mirio Toogata,” Mirio says to Shinsou, sticking out a hand for Shinsou to shake. “You can just call me Mirio, though. I’m a third year here!” Shinsou stares at Mirio’s hand, making no move to shake it.

“Shinsou,” Shinsou says, voice curt. “We were just headed back to the dorm,” he says, a clear dismissal. Izuku swallows, about to apologize for Shinsou, but Mirio just nods, his smile only slipping the tiniest bit.

“I won’t take too much of your time, then,” Mirio says, looking to Izuku. “Have you thought at all about where you’re going to do your work study?” Izuku blinks.

“I-I haven’t really considered it,” Izuku says, picking at the hem of his shirt. He’s considered it, that’s for sure. Izuku has spent more time that he would care to admit worrying about the work studies, about whether or not he’d have the time for it, with his work as Ace and the Gekkeiju and classes on top of it. He knows that mandatory therapy is coming, too, and as much as Izuku is hoping he can get away with just one or two sessions and then never going back, he knows that will take up a bit of his precious, precious time, too.

“You should,” Mirio says, nodding. “It’s a really useful experience. I was actually going to ask, if you don’t have anyone lined up, would you be interested in doing your work study with me and my mentor?” Izuku blinks.

“A-All Might?” Izuku asks. Mirio blinks, then laughs, tipping his head back slightly and shaking

his head.

“Oh, no, not him! Although I can see where the confusion comes from,” Mirio says, smiling. “My mentor for work-studies is Nighteye.” Izuku stares back at Mirio. Izuku has heard of Nighteye, has heard of his foresight quirk. It was part of what Izuku used as inspiration for his fake quirk, Mulligan, after all. Izuku knows just how disastrous it could be for him to meet someone who could *see his future*. What would they see? The closest timeline? Or the one Izuku lets stick?

“I-I don’t know,” Izuku says, biting at his lower lip. “I-I’m worried I might fall behind in my classes,” he says, looking down at the ground between him and Mirio. The concrete is clean and white, still fresh from where this part of the campus was built.

“Just think about it, okay?” Mirio says, voice gentle. “There’s no pressure. Work studies are normally a second year thing, anyway.”

Izuku nods. “Y-Yeah,” he says. “Thank you.” Izuku shuffles his feet slightly. Mirio gives him a bright smile and a thumbs up.

“Of course!” Mirio turns, starting to walk away. “If either of you need anything, you know where to find me,” he says as he starts down the stairs, away from Izuku and Shinsou. Izuku stares after him, swallowing down his anxiety as Shinsou sighs beside him. They turn and walk back into the dorms, talking about classes coming up this semester, but Izuku’s mind is still on Sir Nighteye and what would happen if they ever met.

--

When Izuku slips out of the dorm, sneaks down the stairs and through the quiet woods to his tree, he’s buzzing with excitement. Today is the day where *finally*, he gets to wear the new costume that Miura had prepared for him over a week ago. He’d shoved it into the hollow of the lightning-tree the night before, but he hadn’t looked too closely at it, not wanting to spoil the surprise.

Now, when he pulls it out from the gap in the tree trunk, the pale, grey-blue fabric of the sweater shining in the light of the moon. Izuku carefully takes out each piece of the costume, setting them on the ground. There’s a sweater, with pale, dove-grey and dark blueish argyle patterns on it, made of thick, high quality fabric. The pants are a plain, flat black, with grey patches on the knees with black spades on them, like from a deck of cards. There’s a red utility belt, a lot like his old one, but the pockets on this one have card designs on them, with each suit from a deck, and the belt itself is made from smooth leather instead of cheap fabric.

The jacket is probably the nicest thing about the costume. It’s made from durable, thick red fabric, and it feels protective, like denim. The back is ornately decorated, with card-deck designs in dark blue and red stitched on. There’s also a pair of new, neat red gloves, and a pair of tall, red-leather boots. There’s a logo shaped like a spade with an ornate, script A on both the front and the back of the jacket as well, and Miura included a new set of reflective ski goggles, red and perfectly sized to his face. There’s a mask as well, along with a gauze-like wrap that Izuku thinks is meant to wrap around his neck and face, but he’s not quite sure.

Izuku picks up the sweater, feeling the weight of it in his hands. He slides it on over his head. It’s fairly soft, and when Izuku tugs at the collar to look down at the inside of it, he realizes it’s reversible. The argyle pattern is green and pale gold on the inside, something totally different from the blue and grey of the outside. *I can better hide my identity this way*, Izuku realizes.

He puts the rest of the costume on quickly, noting the way the jacket is reversible too, turning into a plain black leather jacket when turned inside out. The boots look like they can be unbuckled and

the tops folded down to make them look different, if Izuku wanted them to. He marvels at the way the costume fits perfectly; even though Miura had measured him, he hadn't expected it to fit quite *this* well.

When Izuku slicks his hair back with the black gel Miura got for him, easier to put on and less messy than the dye, his look is complete. He shoves his other clothing and the bottle of hair gel into the tree, making sure that none of his stash can be seen unless someone were to go right up to the tree itself.

The night is warm and clear as Izuku sneaks off of campus. It's something he's done a couple of times, now, and it's not hard to get past UA's security as a student. The surveillance bots aren't exactly difficult to spot, now that he knows to look for the blinking red lights on their faces and listen to the sounds of their wheels rumbling on the ground. They don't patrol the wooded area, either, probably because it's not smooth enough for them to roll over. If Izuku ever stops sneaking out, he should tell UA about that security risk. If he can sneak out and back in every night, then it wouldn't be too difficult for someone to steal a student ID and get in the same way he's been doing it.

Izuku waits for the bots patrolling the gate out of campus to turn away from him, then he darts over the threshold. His new clothes are easier to move in than his old costume was, and it sends a thrill through him. He feels so official, like a real hero in a way that he never has in his Deku outfit or in the older version of this costume. It's foreign to him, feeling so confident in what he looks like, even though he wouldn't necessarily say he's the type to worry about his looks. Izuku supposes there's just *something* about having a super cool secret identity and a costume to match.

Izuku slips along the streets of Musutafu, the motion familiar even if his starting point is different, now. He hasn't really, truly patrolled since coming to UA, just tried to complete his mission and tested if he could get out of UA, and he thinks that tonight, he should. Maybe he'll do it after he's gotten the information that he needs out of Death Arm's agency. He still isn't looking forward to that; even as he ducks into an alleyway and scales the fire escape, rusted iron railing digging into his gloves, he's nervous about completing the mission itself. It's easy to get onto the roof, just like he's done so many times before. Jumping from one roof to another, running along the top of the city in goggles and a mask, feels like coming home.

Izuku finds Death Arm's agency building too soon. It's a small thing, especially for a hero as successful as Death Arms is, but Izuku supposes that Death Arms is a local hero, anyway. The building has decorations painted along the bottom of it, the black and yellow stripes matching the arm guards on Death Arms' costume. Izuku knows it's the right place for sure, even though he's currently eyeing the back door from atop a roof.

Izuku doesn't see any cameras or anything like that, not that it would particularly matter for him. He clambers down the side of the neighboring building, his new gloves giving him more purchase than he's ever had before. It's amazing, really; Izuku thinks he could scale nearly sheer surfaces this way. He hops off of the building onto the ground, his feet making a soft noise as they contact the concrete sidewalk. Izuku walks to the door, taking a slow breath.

He tries the knob first, because why not? It's locked, though, and it makes a rattling noise when he tries to turn it each way. Izuku bites at his lower lip, then crouches down to examine the lock itself. There's a keyhole on the outside, thankfully, and Izuku's learned how to pick locks already. He fishes out the supplies he has for it, tucked into the pouch on his belt that's decorated with a 'clubs' design. It's not an actual lockpicking kit, rather something he put together from odds and ends from local stores, but it worked when he taught himself to lockpick for fun in middle school, and it works to pick the lock to the roof-access door at UA. He hopes it's enough for the back door to a

pro's agency.

It only takes Izuku a few moments with his tools, the sounds of metal on metal soft in the space. Izuku can hear the wind whispering between the buildings, just barely covering the sound of the doorknob turning and of Izuku's own too-fast breathing as he pulls the door open. It's a heavy, steel door, but that doesn't do the agency any good with a lock as easy to pick as this one is. Izuku thinks about that Clean guy's quirk, with the soap. He could have easily taken this door off of the hinges the same way Izuku had seen him do before, soaping up the hinges and pulling the pins that hold them together apart.

Izuku steps into the quiet, dark building. The only thing he can hear is the sounds of his breathing from within his mask, the air sneaking through the fabric and the wrap he has covering his face and neck. His footsteps echo through the hallway as he steps inside, pausing to tug the door shut behind him. It clicks shut and leaves Izuku in almost complete darkness for a moment before his eyes start to adjust. There's a window at the front of the building, and in both of the rooms to Izuku's sides, probably. He can see light the same blue-grey as moonlight seeping under the doors.

Izuku tries the first door to the right. It's not marked, but it isn't locked either. Izuku opens it, some part of him hoping for some kind of alarm to go off, so that he can't get the information. The other part of him desperately wants for this mission to go well. Izuku doesn't know if he'd survive another day with Fury angry at him, not if the first time was really as light of a punishment as Fury had said. Izuku lets out a breath when nothing happens, but unfortunately, there isn't anything in the room, either. It looks like a conference room, with a table surrounded by office chairs and a whiteboard on one wall. Izuku shuts the door, turning to the left side of the hallway and trying the door there.

Izuku opens the door to an office. It's decorated, with pictures of happy looking children with grey hair and bright orange eyes. There's two girls and a boy in the pictures, all smiles and laughs. Izuku sees a couple pictures of a woman, too, a lady with black hair and bright orange eyes that match her children's. Izuku realizes, suddenly, that this is Death Arms' office; there's even what looks like a copy of his costume draped over a chair in the back. Izuku takes a deep breath, stepping inside. There's no computer, but Izuku wouldn't be surprised if Death Arms had the information on paper. Izuku doesn't even know if Death Arms does the quirk counseling services himself, or if he'd have the records in his office if it was someone else. Izuku doesn't have any better ideas, though, so he starts opening the desk drawers.

The first drawer just has pencils, pens, envelopes, and tape in it. Izuku bites at his lower lip as he shuts the smaller top drawer and opens the large one below it. It's set up as hanging file storage, with labels for sections. Izuku feels his heart sink when he sees the kanji for "Quirk Counseling" on one of the section dividers. He reaches into the drawer, pulling out that chunk of papers.

Izuku rifles through them, quickly, confirming what they are. Each page has a name, an age, a family quirk history, contact information, and *detailed* analysis of the child's quirk. There are only about twenty files in the record, which doesn't surprise Izuku. From what he'd figured out from poking around on the internet, this isn't exactly a large quirk counseling operation that Death Arms is sponsoring. Izuku sits down on the floor of the office and starts to read.

It doesn't take Izuku long to memorize every name and every quirk, down to the tiniest details. He's spent so long looking at quirks and analyzing them, after all. The words seem to glue themselves to his mind without any problem at all. Izuku doesn't bother putting the papers back, doesn't bother shutting the drawer to the desk. He slips out of the office and into the conference room next door. He feels numb and tired as he sits on the edge of the conference table, staring into the darkness of the building.

The issue isn't that he can't lie about the quirks. It's that Izuku has no idea what *exactly* the Gekkeiju is looking for in a quirk, what quirks will be useful to them. Some of these kids, he's not worried about. There's one who can change the color of her skin, which would make her amazing at camouflage and might even be able to make her invisible if she works with it, but it isn't something that is useful to a villain organization, not now. The thing is that most of the kids, even if their quirk isn't strong or flashy or cool, could easily be abused. There's a kid who can sense animals, including people, within a few hundred feet of him. He could easily be used as security for the Gekkeiju, if that's what they're looking for. There's a pair of siblings, each with weak telekinesis quirks, but their parents' quirks are *strong*. Maybe the Gekkeiju is after fighters. Izuku doesn't know.

Izuku doesn't know how much is safe to omit and how much he can't possibly leave in. Izuku doesn't know what will happen to the kids who meet the Gekkeiju's criteria, if they'll be captured or killed or *what*. Izuku doesn't know anything.

Izuku slides his knife into the flesh of his throat and bleeds out into the building he's broken into. Izuku feels the tug of his quirk, like tiny hands pulling at the edges of his mind, and he prays that he won't be the reason any of these children end up dying, themselves.

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When Izuku walks into the classroom to meet Shinsou and Aizawa for their private training, he's surprised to see three familiar faces in addition to Shinsou's. Maka, Ema, and Haruta are all standing near the front of the classroom, with Maka leaning against Aizawa's desk and licking the underside of a blue popsicle. Ema and Haruta are talking quietly as they stand between Maka and the far wall of the room. Shinsou is sitting in his usual seat, a scowl plastered on his face. Izuku steps into the room, his fingers twisting in each other as he fidgets.

"Um," he starts, and Ema and Haruta both turn to look at him, their cat ears twitching in unison. "Where's Aizawa-sensei?"

"Probably asleep," Maka answers, glancing over at him. She stares him dead in the eye and takes a bite out of her popsicle. Izuku winces in sympathy for her teeth, but she seems unbothered. Izuku can't smell the scent of her quirk, which he wonders about, but he supposes between the air conditioning, the popsicle, and the fact that she's wearing a wine red tank top and a pair of athletic shorts, she'd be hard pressed to sweat at all. Izuku's grateful for that; he's not sure if he could handle the enhanced fear right now.

"He's on a mission," Ema says, giving Izuku a nod. "He asked us to train with you two today instead! We're still supposed to be mentoring you guys anyway, so it works out." She nudges her brother with an elbow. "Haruta had a good idea."

"It's a shitty idea," Shinsou mutters. Izuku looks at him, frowning.

"I-It kind of is, yeah," Haruta agrees. Izuku looks back and forth between the two of them. After a moment of nobody explaining, Izuku swallows.

"Uh, w-what is it?" Izuku asks, and Ema perks up.

"Haruta was wondering if Shinsou would be able to make people do more complicated stuff, since he can make people sleep!" Ema holds a finger up, her pink eyes sparkling. "Shinsou says he can't make people answer questions and stuff, but maybe with enough training, he can!" She smiles. "I know it wouldn't really be training for you, but maybe next time we can--"

“I think that’s a great idea!” Izuku says, a grin splitting his face. “Shinsou’s quirk has so much potential for stuff like that! Like, do we know that his quirk is constrained by what the person he’s controlling knows how to do? Or is it based on what he knows? If he knows how to skateboard but the person he’s brainwashing doesn’t and he asked them to skateboard, could they or would--”

“Midoriya,” Shinsou says, sighing and dropping his head onto his desk. Izuku blinks, freezing.

“S-Sorry, I didn’t mean to ramble!” Izuku says, raising his hands in front of him. “I-I just think your quirk has a lot of potential uses!” He sees Ema nodding out of the corner of his eye, and she chimes in.

“Yeah, exactly!” she says. “I think you should give it a shot. I don’t mind being brainwashed, and if I want to get released, Haruta should be able to tell you, since he can read my mind the whole time.” She gives Shinsou a thumbs up. “You don’t have to worry about me judging you or anything, either! I had a really hard time managing my quirk for a long time.” Shinsou sighs, lifting his head from the desk. He glances over to Izuku, giving him a long-suffering stare before he looks over to Ema.

“Fine,” he says. “But don’t get your hopes up,” he drawls, leaning back in his seat and crossing his arms over his chest. “I seriously doubt that, even if my quirk is capable of something like this, that I’d figure out how to do it in just one session.”

“Who says it’ll be just one, silly?” Ema says, sticking out her tongue at Shinsou. “Go ahead, whenever you’re ready!” Ema leans forward eagerly. Shinsou stares back at her, violet eyes half-closed.

“Alright. Uh,” Shinsou pauses, like he’s thinking. “Why pink, for the contacts?”

Ema smiles. “Oh, it’s my favorite--” she trails off, her face going blank. The pink contacts seem to hide the effect Shinsou’s quirk usually has on the way his target’s eyes look, but it’s clear that she’s being controlled. Next to her, Haruta’s brow furrows slightly. Izuku watches Shinsou turn his gaze to him.

“What now?” he asks, unfolding his arms where they’re crossed over his chest to rest one elbow on the desk in front of him. Haruta blinks.

“U-Um, you should try getting her to ask a question,” Haruta says, swallowing. “It... it’s different then I expected it to feel, reading her like this.”

Shinsou raises an eyebrow. “I have no idea what that means,” he drawls, but Izuku thinks he can hear something that might be anxiety in Shinsou’s voice. Haruta chews on his lower lip, thinking.

“Mm,” he hums. “It’s like she’s asleep, but not dreaming. I thought it’d feel more distinct. Most mind affecting quirks feel really obvious, but this one is subtle.” He raises a hand to his chin. “Try asking her to do something?” Izuku watches them as Shinsou nods, then looks back at Ema.

“Tell me your favorite color,” he says, his voice rippling with the faint power it holds when he uses his quirk. Ema doesn’t move an inch, but Haruta blinks, his eyes widening.

“Oh, you--” Haruta blinks, giving his head a shake, his long grey hair swishing as he does. “That--that did something,” he says. Izuku can see Shinsou arch an eyebrow.

“Doesn’t look like it,” Shinsou says. Haruta shakes his head, again.

“No, she--she thought about it. H-Her favorite color,” Haruta explains, reaching one hand up to

fidget with one of his ears, furry and grey and sticking out of his hair. Shinsou's eyes narrow.

"Tell me your favorite color," he says again, and it sounds the same to Izuku, but he sees Haruta's face twitch, and Ema opens her mouth.

"Pink," she says, her voice lacking any inflection at all. Izuku watches Shinsou's eyes widen.

"Whoa, that was really cool!" Izuku says, grinning. Haruta nods, his blue eyes wide. Maka throws her popsicle stick across the room, and it makes a quiet clattering sound as it lands on a desk. Everyone turns to look at her except Ema.

"What did you do different?" Maka asks, eyes on Shinsou. Shinsou stares back at her, face dropping into the slightest frown.

"I just pushed harder," he says. Maka raises an eyebrow, and Shinsou sighs, rolling his eyes. "It's how my quirk works. I have to put pressure behind commands," he says. "It's more pressure for more people, so I tried doing it like she was multiple people."

"What's truly amazing," Maka drawls, "is that you're so smart and yet you still haven't tried that before." She folds her arms over her chest, shutting her eyes. Izuku frowns, but Shinsou just snorts.

"Okay, says the one who doesn't have to do anything at all to activate her quirk," Shinsou says. He turns back to Ema. "Tell me your birthday," he says, and when Izuku watches this time, he can see the faintest hints of strain on Shinsou's face.

"December thirteenth," Ema answers. Haruta nods, confirming it. Maka hums approvingly under her breath, her eyes still shut.

"Looks like you really can get them to answer questions, Shinsou!" Izuku says, giving Shinsou a little smile when he looks over at Izuku.

"Those are easy questions," Maka says. Izuku sees Shinsou's head snap over to glare at him. "Ask her something that makes her think."

Shinsou sighs, but he says, "Tell me something I don't know," he says. Nothing happens, except Shinsou's eyes narrow and Haruta frowns slightly.

"Maybe vague things are a little too much right now?" He suggests, worrying at his lower lip. Shinsou nods curtly.

"Tell me what you're doing after this," he says. Izuku looks over to Ema, who opens her mouth.

"I'm going to go on a dinner date with Maka-chan," she says plainly. Izuku blinks.

"You two are dating?" he blurts out, before he can think better of it. Maka opens one eye and looks at him with a lazy gaze.

"Obviously," she says, then shuts her eye again. "That was a good one. How are you feeling?" she asks. Izuku blinks, glancing over to Shinsou. Now that Izuku looks at him, he's slightly pale in the face, with beads of sweat gathering on his forehead.

"I'm fine," Shinsou says, gritting his teeth. Maka grunts in acknowledgement, but doesn't say anything else, at least not immediately. Izuku watches as she takes a few breaths, tapping her fingers against the skin of her arms.

“Ask her to use her quirk to tell you something you couldn’t know,” Maka says. “She should be able to hear anything in this building at the very least, and she can probably smell whatever there is in the cafeteria.” Izuku turns his gaze to Shinsou, who narrows his eyes in concentration.

“Tell me how many people you can hear in this building, the five of us excluded,” Shinsou says. There’s a moment’s pause, with the only sound in the room being the tick of the clock that hangs at the back.

“Six,” Ema replies. Izuku blinks, looking over to Shinsou. His friend’s face looks strained, his lips pressed together into a line. A bead of sweat rolls down his forehead, collecting in his violet eyebrow.

“We should stop,” Haruta says, quietly. “Ema’s fine, but I can feel your headache from here, and I’m not even trying to read you, Shinsou.” He frowns slightly at Shinsou, a downturn to his lips that lessens suddenly when Ema blinks, reaching up a hand to rub at her eyes.

“Okay, that was freaking cool,” she says, licking her lips. “We should totally work more on that in the future! It was like I was a video game character and you were the player!” she bounces on her heels, excitedly. Izuku glances to Shinsou, who swallows, his face still pale.

“Whatever,” he says under his breath.

“Take him back to the dorm, Midoriya,” Maka says, and when Izuku glances up at her, she’s opened her eyes and taken a few steps away from the desk, towards Shinsou and Izuku. “Next time we’ll focus on you to make up for it.” Izuku nods quickly, turning back to Shinsou. He takes a step towards Shinsou, to offer him a hand, but Shinsou’s rising from his chair before Izuku gets the chance.

They walk back to the dorms together, and even if Shinsou is quiet and in pain, Izuku can tell he’s excited. Izuku’s excited, too. With a quirk as powerful as Shinsou’s, there’s nothing he couldn’t do.

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Izuku’s in the common room when he gets the phone call. He feels the vibration through the pocket of his cargo shorts, and even though he knows that his burner phone is upstairs, between his mattress and the bedframe, for a moment, his blood fills with icy anxiety and he feels himself go pale. He fishes his phone out of his pocket, relaxing when he confirms that, yes, it’s his normal phone. The screen says the call is from Mirko. Izuku blinks at it for a moment, then hops off the couch and starts to walk away from the movie he, Todoroki, Uraraka, Iida, and Tsuyu had been watching.

“I-I gotta take this!” he says, holding up his phone and pointing at it. He sees Todoroki and Uraraka nod, and that’s enough for him to quickly walk over to the back of the room, where there’s nobody to disturb with his call. He accepts the call, holding the phone up to his ear.

“H-Hello?” he says, his voice shaky. He hears some rustling on the other end.

“Hey kid!” Mirko says, her voice bright and loud. “How’s it goin’? I heard they stuck you in dorms.”

“Um, y-yeah!” Izuku says, relaxing slightly. He leans against the wall, shoving his free hand in his pocket. “I-It’s been pretty good. I got my provisional license,” he adds, biting at his lower lip.

“That’s awesome!” Mirko says, and Izuku can hear the grin in her voice even over the phone. “I

knew you would. Kind of what I wanted to ask you about, actually. Would you wanna do a work study with me?" Izuku blinks.

"Uh, m-maybe!" he says, swallowing. "I'm, um, not sure I'm going to have time, to be honest..." He trails off a little, and he hears Mirko hum knowingly on the other end.

"Yeah, hero school is kinda crazy," she says. "If you decide you want to do one, I'm just sayin' you're my first pick, 'kay?" She laughs brightly over the receiver. "And when you guys do your second round of them, defo give me a call."

"O-Okay," Izuku replies. He swallows again, around a bit of anxiety in his throat. "I-I'm sorry that I'm not doing one, it's just t-that--" Mirko cuts him off.

"Hey, none of that. I'm glad you're being responsible about school 'n stuff. I bet if you did a work study too, you'd end up just staying up all night to study, right?" She chuckles. "Nah, you're doing the right thing here, kiddo. Don't overextend yourself." Izuku smiles slightly, feeling something that, embarrassingly enough, feels like tears prickling in his eyes.

"O-Okay, Mirko," he says. "Thank you!" He hears her hum on the other end of the phone.

"Of course, of course!" There's a slight rustling. "You can always call or text me if you want to, you know. I can't help with homework, though, just warning you." Izuku giggles slightly at that.

"I-I'll call you if I need to," he says, even though he doesn't really anticipate actually *doing* that. Izuku wouldn't want to bother Mirko with anything, not when she's a top ten hero.

"Good!" Mirko replies. "I'm gonna let you go now, but make sure to give me a call if you change your mind and think you've got enough time for a work study."

Izuku nods, then remembers she can't see him. "R-Right!" he chirps. "Bye, Mirko!" She chuckles lightly.

"Bye-bye, kiddo," she says, and then the phone clicks, telling Izuku that she's hung up. He slides the phone back into his pocket and takes a deep, steadying breath. Even though Mirko doesn't know that he's taking the extra time to break the law, that he's staying up most nights *anyway*, it still feels nice to hear her praise. Izuku walks back over to his friends with a smile on his face.

Chapter End Notes

content warning: nothing out of the ordinary

[discord!](#)







[reference](#) for ace's new costume, designed and drawn by the amazing [mrsketchy!!](#)

sorry this one was late, by the way!!! today sucked major ass and im having health issues (again) so i had to stay up late to finish it lolz

truth and lies

Chapter Summary

last time: mirio is like "bro come work for sir" then he goes out as ace in his new fit to break in to Death Arms place and kill himself. trains with maka and co. shinsou can get information now. mirko asks izu to intern (summary by ppl in my server bc im brain dead rn)

Chapter Notes

hi guys!!!

something i want to address real quick--a lot of people have been asking if this story will include romance. i didn't want to reveal that necessarily, but ive been getting a lot of questions about it, and i've also gotten some not-so-nice comments, so i thought i would address that. if you don't want to know, please stop reading this note here!

there will not be any romantic relationships with izuku in this fic. there may be one-sided romantic feelings from other characters or relationships between side characters. i want to focus on developing platonic relationships in this fic. i also don't believe a relationship would be healthy for izuku in his current state. i will likely post separate, non-canon oneshots for the more popular ships for this fic (such as bakudeku, tododeku, shindeku, and monodeku). if you have a problem with this decision, then im sorry. i have been getting some very very rude comments, claiming that my fic was a "waste of time" or would be "ruined" if i did or didn't do certain ships in the fic.

i write this fanfiction for free. i spend 4-6 hours a DAY writing this. im under no obligation to share it with others. i love writing, and the majority of things people send me are positive, but im still a person and the negative comments still hurt.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Izuku is sitting on the edge of the rooftop, his legs dangling over the ledge as he stares out at the city. It's a cool night, with the wind crisp against the slivers of his face between his goggles and his new mask. He's just finished a patrol, one of his usual ones, and after three robberies and two attempted assaults, he's pretty exhausted. It's a good kind of exhaustion, though, the kind that sticks to his bones and reminds him that even if he does evil with the Gekkeiju, he's done something good here tonight.

Izuku takes a deep, slow breath when he hears the sound of someone landing on the other side of the rooftop, behind him. He might be nervous, might turn and look to see who it is, if he couldn't hear the soft rustling of thick fabric, the sound that Aizawa's capture weapon always, always makes. Izuku doesn't turn his head.

"Hi, Eraserhead," Izuku says, quietly. "It's starting to cool off, isn't it?" He kicks his legs back against the roof, his heels knocking against the brick of the building below him. He hears Aizawa

take a few steps closer to him, hears a soft sigh.

"I hadn't noticed," Aizawa answers. "You've got a new look." Izuku nods, leaning back and putting his weight on his hands.

"Yep," Izuku answers, popping the *p*. "Pretty cool, right?"

"Yeah," Aizawa says. "Why don't you get away from the ledge so we can talk?" Izuku blinks at that, turning his head back to look at his teacher.

"What, are you worried I'm going to fall?" Izuku asks. He sees Aizawa staring back at him, arms crossed over his chest. Izuku sighs, lifting his legs and pulling himself to his feet, taking a few steps away from the edge itself. He faces Aizawa, shoving his hands into the pockets of his new pants and staring his teacher down. He's even more hidden than usual, with how much better the new costume really disguises him, but he still feels strangely exposed. His teacher stares back at him, eyes glinting behind golden goggles.

"You've been busy tonight," Aizawa says. "More than you usually are." Izuku nods. He usually doesn't stay out this long or stop quite this much crime, but that's because he normally tries to get a little more sleep.

"Just felt like staying out longer, I guess," Izuku stays, shrugging. "I have some information for you, by the way." He looks at Aizawa's chest instead of his eyes; it's not like Aizawa would be able to see that Izuku isn't looking him in the eye, anyway.

"Oh?" Aizawa asks, raising an eyebrow. "I know I told you to stay away from villain organizations," he says, and Izuku can't help but snort.

"Kinda hard to do that in my line of work," Izuku says, not without a hint of bitterness. *How funny is it that I got myself into this situation as Izuku, not Ace?* "The Gekkeiju are investigating children's quirks," he says. "Not sure what they want, exactly, but you should probably keep an eye out on the kids who got counseling in the area." Izuku chews on the inside of his cheek, wondering if it'd be safe to give the specific name of the agency. He sees Aizawa's brows furrow.

"How do you know that?" Aizawa asks. "We've made multiple pros and multiple detectives from the police force working on investigating the Gekkeiju for months now, and we have nothing." Aizawa takes a breath. "How did you get that information, Ace?"

Izuku swallows. "I, uh." He takes a step back, glancing behind him to double check the height of the roof. "You're not about to arrest me, are you?"

Aizawa huffs out a breath, rolling his eyes. "No, I'm not. I want to know exactly how much danger you're in, so that if someone matching your description goes missing, we have the necessary information to find you." He sighs. "The Gekkeiju is one of the two organizations that attacked UA a month and a half ago, as I'm sure you've heard. They're dangerous, Ace."

"So you've said," Izuku mutters. "I'll survive." Izuku fidgets with the ends of his sleeves, the thick sweater fabric warm and textured even through his gloves.

"...right," Aizawa says, then sighs. "I can't help you if you don't give me any information to work with, Ace." Izuku swallows.

"I, uh. Might have." Izuku takes a slow breath, aware of Aizawa's gaze on him. "I might have joined the Gekkeiju?" His voice picks up in pitch near the end, as he sees Aizawa's eyes narrow behind the goggles.

“You *what*,” Aizawa growls. He sighs, pressing the palm of one hand to his forehead. “You’re going to be the death of me, I swear,” he mutters.

“I-If it helps at all, I’m pretty sure they don’t know I’m spying on them,” Izuku says, holding his palms out and shrugging. Aizawa stares at him for a long moment. Izuku feels his heartbeat pick up under the scrutiny, feels a thin sheen of sweat form on his face, under his costume. Izuku would really, really like for Aizawa to stop staring at him.

“Okay,” Aizawa says, squeezing his eyes shut for a moment. “Fuck, okay. You’re a double agent. Great. A vigilante with an unknown identity who is almost certainly a child is actively working with villains who are known to abduct and kill children.” He tips his head back slightly, his palm still pressed to his forehead. “Amazing, really.” Izuku stares at him.

“Sorry?” Izuku offers. He presses his mouth into a thin line and looks to the side. “I didn’t really have a choice. They have prisoners, and I-I can’t just.... I can’t just *leave* them there,” he says, clenching his hands into fists. “There’s a *kid*. A little girl.”

“*You’re* a kid,” Aizawa says quietly, but he sighs, dropping his hands to his sides. “Okay,” he says, firmly, in his teacher-voice. “This is what we’re going to do. I’m going to provide you support on this, and you’ll keep me updated on your status and what’s going on.” Izuku opens his mouth to reply, a little noise coming out before Aizawa gives him a look, continuing. “You’re doing this to get us information anyway, right? It’ll be easier for you to help the people they’re holding captive if you’re in regular contact with me.”

Izuku nods, slowly. “I-I don’t want to reveal my identity,” he says, swallowing. “I can keep you updated, but I’m not going to tell you who I am.” Aizawa nods, with a slight sigh.

“I kind of figured as much,” he says, “although I think it’d be safer for you if I knew.” He looks Izuku over, with a thoughtful gaze. “Are you doing okay?” he asks, voice softening slightly. Izuku wonders what he’d seen in Izuku’s body language that made him ask that. Izuku knows he’s been fidgeting a fair amount, picking at his sleeves and flexing his hands, but he doesn’t think it’s *obvious*.

“I’m fine,” Izuku answers, shortly. “I really don’t need any help, but it would be good to have a way to get in contact with you quickly,” he says. “I-I still have your contact info.” Izuku has it memorized, but Aizawa doesn’t need to know that. “I could text you?”

Aizawa nods. “That will work,” he says, crossing his arms over his chest. “Will you, though? You’ve had my number this entire time, but you haven’t contacted me once.” Izuku swallows. *I can’t exactly tell him that he would recognize my main phone number, if I’d called him.*

“I-I will, if it’s an emergency,” Izuku says, shifting. “I should--I should probably go now,” he says, lamely. It’s true enough, at least; the sun is starting to light the edge of the sky, not quite breaking above the horizon. Izuku won’t be sleeping tonight, but he’ll need to hurry if he’s going to clean the gel from his hair in the bathrooms before anyone else is awake to catch him. Aizawa breathes out.

“Okay,” he says. “I’d tell you not to take any unnecessary risks, but I know you wouldn’t listen, anyway,” Aizawa says, his eyes narrowed behind his goggles. Izuku bites back a smile as he steps back over to the edge of the roof, sliding down onto the fire escape below. Izuku pauses for a moment, then turns, climbing back up onto the roof.

“Wait, A--Eraserhead!” Izuku calls, scrambling back onto the roof. “There’s something I forgot to tell you.” He sees Aizawa turn back to look at him from the other end of the roof.

“I, uh, I overheard some intel on the League,” Izuku says. “Toga Himiko--she infiltrated the provisional license exam,” he says, watching as Aizawa’s brows knit together.

“What?” he asks, walking towards Izuku. Izuku swallows.

“She was pretending to be a Shiketsu student, I think. Her quirk, it lets her transform into another person. That’s all I know, though,” he finishes, biting at his lower lip. “I really should go now.”

Aizawa stares at him. “Right,” Aizawa says, with a sigh. “Text me sometime in this next week, so that I can contact you if we get any intel that suggests the Gekkeiju could be onto you,” he says, and Izuku nods.

“I will,” he promises, and he slips away again, this time for real.

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When Izuku approaches Aizawa after class, Aizawa is at the chalkboard, erasing away the notes from that day’s lecture. Izuku sees him glance over his shoulder, then turn back to the board, swiping the eraser over the last portion of the board before he sets the eraser down on the ledge under the board that holds the chalk.

“Yes?” Aizawa asks, turning to look at Izuku. He goes to put his hands in his pockets, but he pauses, looking down at his hands. Izuku can see the white chalk powder coating them.

“I-I wanted to ask, um, permission to go home this weekend,” Izuku says, shuffling his feet as he watches Aizawa walk over to his desk and open a drawer, fiddling around for a moment before he pulls out what looks like a baby wipe. He looks up at Izuku as he wipes the chalk powder from his hands.

“No,” Aizawa says, his face and voice serious as he meets Izuku’s eyes. “You’re not leaving campus until you explain to either myself or your mother how you managed to get that injury last time you went home,” he says. Izuku blinks, opening his mouth and stuttering out a reply while Aizawa walks to the trash can and dumps his used wipe there.

“You--You talked to my m-mom?” Izuku asks. Aizawa looks back over at him as he crosses the classroom, moving to one of the desks in the front row and sitting on top of it, crossing his legs over each other.

“Sit,” Aizawa says, waving a hand at the desk next to him. Izuku swallows thickly and moves, taking a seat in the chair. He’s lower down than Aizawa this way, and it makes him feel even smaller, but he doesn’t think that Aizawa would be fond of him sitting on top of the desk itself, either.

“Yes, your mother and I talked,” Aizawa says, leaning forward and leaning one of his forearms on his crossed legs. “Since it doesn’t appear to be her inflicting these injuries on you, we don’t have any idea of who hurt you or under what circumstances,” Aizawa says, his dark eyes half lidded. “It would be illogical to send you back into a situation where you would likely be injured.” Izuku stares back at him. *I can’t believe Mom would do this to me*, he thinks as he stares at Aizawa with wide eyes. *She knows what’s at stake, doesn’t she? Why would she interfere?*

“I-I have to go,” Izuku says, biting at his lower lip and fisting his hands in the fabric of his uniform pants. Aizawa’s face doesn’t change

“Why?” Aizawa asks, simply.

“I just--I just need to,” Izuku says, blinking back stinging tears of frustration where they’ve started to form at the bottom edge of his eye. “I *have* to.” Aizawa arches an eyebrow at him.

“If you’re able to explain the reason, and what happened, I might change my mind,” Aizawa says. “I’m trying to make sure you’re safe, Midoriya.”

“I *am* safe,” Izuku replies. Aizawa sighs.

“I don’t think you are,” he says, uncrossing his legs and standing up from the desk. “This conversation is over, Midoriya,” Aizawa says, shoving his hands in his pockets and taking a few steps toward the door. “If you’d like to talk to me about anything,” he says, pausing in the doorway, “I’ll be in the staff dorm. I’m not going to let you leave campus to go somewhere you’ve been seriously injured.” He steps out of the room, and Izuku stares after him. His first thought is, *a broken wrist isn’t a serious injury*, and then he’s processing what just happened.

Izuku could just sneak out. The thing is, since Izuku asked and because he’d have to leave in the morning, chances are good that someone would catch him as he tried to sneak away, tried to slip between the robots and Aizawa and everyone. The other problem is that Fury might ask Izuku to stay the night. He might injure Izuku again, might break his arm or burn him or use his quirk on Izuku. Suddenly, viscerally, Izuku wishes he *hadn’t* told Aizawa when he was hurt, last time. It had made training easier, that day, and it had been nice to receive healing, but now Izuku is paying the price. He’s being punished for his slip-up.

Izuku takes a deep, slow breath. He wraps his hand around his backpack strap where it’s thrown over his shoulder. He walks out of the classroom, down the hall to the bathrooms.

He takes out a knife, he cuts, and he bleeds.

--

“Yes?” Aizawa asks as Izuku opens his eyes. His teacher is turning to look at Izuku, his hands still covered in chalk. Izuku blinks for a moment, biting at his bottom lip as he gathers himself.

“I-I wanted to ask you if I--if I could go home, um, this weekend,” Izuku says. He watches Aizawa open the desk drawer, again, take out the wet wipe, again, and start to wipe his hands clean.

“No,” Aizawa says. Izuku knows he’s going to say more, but Izuku opens his mouth and starts to talk before his teacher can get his explanation out.

“I-I’m not going to get hurt again,” Izuku says, and he watches Aizawa’s brow raise as he chucks the wipe into the trash can, making the shot without even looking.

“I don’t believe you,” Aizawa says, shoving his now-clean hands into his pockets. He takes a few steps, putting himself in front of his desk rather than behind it, still facing Izuku.

“I know,” Izuku replies. “If I--If I tell you what happened, would you let me?” He watches his teacher sit on the same desk as last time. Izuku moves to sit in the chair across from him, even before his teacher asks him to. Aizawa watches him with a serious expression.

“That depends on how you got hurt,” he says, his eyes on Izuku. “What happened?” Izuku swallows.

“I, uh, got into a fight,” Izuku says, swallowing and looking down at the ground. “I’m not the most popular person in my neighborhood, right now, so, uh, when I ran into some kids from my middle school...” he trails off, glancing up at Aizawa. His teacher’s brows are furrowed, slightly, creased

in the center of his face.

“Midoriya,” he says, slowly. “That handprint on your arm was not from someone your age.” Aizawa looks at him like he’s trying to see into Izuku’s brain. Izuku swallows.

“H-He was kind of a big guy?” Izuku offers. Aizawa stares back at him.

“...No,” he says, sighing and rising from his place on the desk. “I’m not going to let you go, especially when you’ve just lied to me about what happened,” Aizawa says, his lips pressed into a thin line. “You’ll be staying on campus, Midoriya.” Aizawa turns, moving to walk out of the classroom. Izuku watches him go, despair rolling in the pit of his stomach.

Izuku wonders, as the sounds of Aizawa’s footsteps grow quieter and quieter, if he’d get caught if he tried to kill himself by jumping off the roof. He wonders if someone would get there in time to stop him, to keep him from jumping. Based on what Neito had said about when he died of that overdose and how Izuku has started to feel the pull of his quirk as he loses consciousness, he’s not really worried about surviving the fall itself. Izuku’s not sure how, exactly, his quirk chooses when he resets and when he doesn’t, but it hasn’t let him fail an attempt, not yet.

Izuku doesn’t want to risk Aizawa seeing him on the roof, though. He doesn’t want to risk getting restrained and hospitalized, getting put in a situation where he can’t reset and he can’t sneak out. Izuku walks to the bathroom quietly, his breathing even and calm. He’s killed himself so many times, for so many reasons, that at this point, it’s almost routine. Izuku can’t tell if he’s excited about it, excited for the thrill that it will give him, or if it’s like a chore, if he wants to just get it over with.

Either way, Izuku supposes it doesn’t matter. He walks into the bathroom just the same. He steps into the last stall just the same. He latches the door and sits down on the tile floor just the same.

His arms barely sting when he slices them open. The smell of blood is bright and burning. Izuku shuts his eyes, leans his head back against the wall, and thinks.

--

“Yes?” Aizawa asks, and Izuku swallows. He knows what’s coming next, knows that Aizawa will wipe the chalk dust from his hands, knows that if he asks to go home, he’ll be told no.

“I-I-I wanted to--to tell you about what happened,” Izuku stammers, shuffling his feet as Aizawa’s gaze sharpens. “Last--last weekend, I mean.” Aizawa doesn’t move to the drawer of his desk, doesn’t pull out a wipe. Instead, he walks from out behind the desk, brushing his hands off on each other as he approaches Izuku.

“What happened?” Aizawa asks, simply. He sits on the desk nearest Izuku, folding his hands together in his lap and giving Izuku his full attention. Izuku swallows under the scrutiny, but at the same time, there’s something nice about being taken seriously. It’s something that only his mom had ever done for him, growing up. He’s never had a teacher like Aizawa, never had a teacher who *cared* what Izuku had to say.

“You know I--that I wasn’t the most p-popular kid in middle school,” Izuku starts, wringing his hands together. “I, um, got b-bullied, of course, but, ah.” He looks up at Aizawa, twisting his face into a grimace. “I-It wasn’t always just--it wasn’t just the--the kids,” he says, his breath hitching in his throat. The thing is, it’s not entirely a lie. Izuku sees Aizawa’s brow furrow, slightly.

“What do you mean?” he asks, something like a warning in his voice, but Izuku doesn’t think it’s

directed at him. Izuku swallows.

“I--when I, um, was--when I was--I--” Izuku shakes his head, unable to get the words out. He’s not sure if it’s because he’s going to lie to his teacher or because he’s never told anyone, not even Kacchan or his mom, about the fact that he’s had teachers hold him back after class to tell him that he should stop asking questions in class, that the students with quirks needed that time, that Izuku would end up killing himself before he graduated, anyway. He’s never told anyone about when a teacher slapped him for mumbling about her quirk, when a teacher took his notebooks and refused to give them back. A teacher had never actually *hurt* him, not like he’s about to imply, but they’d certainly been cruel.

“Midoriya, breathe,” Aizawa says, frowning. “Are you trying to say one of your old teachers hurt you like that?” Izuku looks up at his teacher for a moment, swallows, and nods.

“He, uh, I-I don’t think that he meant to--to break my wrist,” Izuku says, shifting his feet. “He--he just was holding me, a-and I struggled,” Izuku says, chewing on the skin of his bottom lip.

“Whether you struggled or not, it’s not your fault,” Aizawa says, a deep crease to his brows and a frown on his lips. “What’s his name?”

Izuku shakes his head. “I-I don’t want--he’s a good teacher, r-really,” Izuku says, looking at Aizawa’s hands, clenched tight around each other, instead of his face. “It was--he’d only ever been like that to me. I-I think he was mad, about--about me getting into UA.”

“He’s not a good teacher if he would hurt a former student,” Aizawa says, slowly. “No teacher should ever, *ever* hurt his students.” He pins Izuku with his gaze, sharp with concern. “Do you understand, Midoriya?”

“I-I do,” Izuku says, his voice dull. “I still--I don’t want to get him in trouble,” Izuku says, his voice watery. *I’m a terrible person*, he thinks glumly. *Now Aizawa thinks that I’ve had this terrible past, when I really haven’t, not at all.*

Aizawa sighs. “Okay,” he says. “I would like to know who it was, but I’ll let it go, for now.” He meets Izuku’s eyes with his own, dark and bloodshot. “Thank you for telling me, Midoriya. I’m glad that you did.” Izuku nods, shakily.

“C-Can I go home this weekend?” Izuku asks, shuffling his feet. “I-I know where he’ll be, um, so I-I can avoid him,” Izuku says. “I-It won’t happen again.” Aizawa’s eyes narrow slightly, and he hesitates for a moment before answering.

“I’d like you to get your mother’s permission, first,” Aizawa says, “since when she and I spoke last, she didn’t want you going home, either, but if she agrees, then yes.” Izuku blinks, then gives Aizawa a watery smile.

“I-I’ll ask her,” he says. “Thank you, sensei!” Aizawa gives him a nod, and when Izuku skips out of the classroom, he doesn’t even look in the direction of the bathroom.

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After everything Izuku has had to do to be allowed to leave campus tomorrow, after the resets and the conversations with Aizawa, after telling his mom that he’d be careful and that he’d be in worse danger if he *didn’t* go, Izuku should be happy to be able to leave. He should be excited, even. He could gain valuable information, information that would save the life of a child, if he does this right.

Except, Izuku does not feel excited. Izuku doesn't actually want to go to the Gekkeiju tower, and if he had any sort of choice, he wouldn't. The thing is, anytime Izuku considers not going, considers telling Aizawa the truth about everything that's happened so far, considers letting Aizawa keep him safe on campus with his friends and his mom, all Izuku can see is Mouse, small and scared and hurt. He sees the burn-shaped scars on Mouse's arms, except they're not scars, they're fresh, and Fury is holding her tiny arms in a bruising grip, his handprint forming on her skin.

So Izuku is sitting in his room, sitting on his bed with the door locked and a towel spread in his lap. His biceps are cut to shreds, dripping with crimson-dark blood, and his razor rests on his lap, on the black towel that's stained dark with blood. The marks from his burns, from two weeks ago, have started to heal, but they're not all the way closed. The one that had been worse, the lower one, is scabbed up. Izuku knows they would still be visible, as scars, for months at least. There's not any point in him not cutting himself, not when he's got no choice but to hide his arms anyway.

Izuku doesn't bandage the cuts. He doesn't wipe the blood off of them, doesn't move the razor or the towel from his lap. He takes out his phone, his eyes half-shut with exhaustion and the cool, empty nothingness that comes with hurting himself. He hovers over his contact list. What he really wants right now is for someone to come and hold him, to draw him tight to their chest and tell him that it's going to be okay. Izuku could ask for that, if he texted Neito. Neito would come to his room, and he would hold him. But Neito would see the blood and Neito would worry about him. Neito might even pressure him to tell Aizawa, and Izuku doesn't think he can take that right now.

The same thing would happen, if Izuku told Shinsou, although not *exactly*. Shinsou would catch on to the fact that Izuku is upset, and he'd come over. They live right next door to each other, after all. Izuku hasn't cleaned up the blood on his arms, hasn't hidden the towel or the razor. He might be able to hide them, but if Shinsou used his quirk and asked what took Izuku so long, it'd be a disaster. Izuku doesn't think that Shinsou would use his quirk, not necessarily, but it's not worth the risk.

Izuku doesn't think that Kacchan would be a good choice, either. Not because Kacchan would worry too much, but because he doesn't do small talk and wouldn't want to comfort Izuku even if Izuku asked for that. Izuku can't have comfort in person, not right now, but he wants *something*. Izuku taps on Todoroki's contact.

Hi, Todoroki, Izuku sends, leaning back in his bed so that his back is cushioned by his comforter, warm and soft beneath him. Izuku's phone buzzes almost immediately, and Izuku picks it up with a soft smile.

Hello, Midoriya. How are you? reads Todoroki's reply. Izuku settles into the bed, turning on his side. He feels the razor roll off of his lap, onto the bed, but he thinks his arms have coagulated enough that he won't bleed all over the bed, at least.

Been better, but I'm okay, Izuku types back. *You?*

I'm good. What's wrong? Todoroki replies. Izuku smiles slightly. He feels a little guilty for using Todoroki like this, for making him give Izuku comfort, but at the same time, Izuku thinks he deserves this, at least.

Hard night, Izuku replies. *Nothing specific. Sometimes it's just like that, you know?* He sees the icon that means Todoroki is typing pop up, but it takes longer for a message to send than it usually would. Izuku stares at the icon on the screen, swallowing. *Did I say something wrong?*

Izuku shuts his phone off for a moment, setting it down on his bedspread. He grabs the razor from where it'd fallen. He grabs it, picking it up and holding it in his palm. He reaches into the pocket of

his pants, pulling out the small pill box he's started keeping his razor in. It fits perfectly, it won't cut him by mistake, and it doesn't look odd, not to anyone who might happen to see it. His phone buzzes as he snaps it shut.

Have you been hurting yourself? It's okay if you don't want to say. I won't pressure you. Izuku reads Todoroki's message, blinking. Izuku feels his face turn red as he clenches and unclenches the hand that isn't holding his phone. As he's staring at the phone, Todoroki asks another question.

Sorry, it reads, *I shouldn't have asked that. You don't have to tell me anything.* Izuku takes a deep breath and types a reply.

No, it's okay, he sends. *I have.* There's a pause, a moment between when Izuku types out the reply and when Todoroki responds.

I'm sorry. Is there anything I can do to help? Izuku can imagine Todoroki's face as he reads the message, can imagine the way his lips would drop into a frown, his brows creasing over his mismatched eyes.

No, it's okay. Izuku replies. *I'm feeling better already.*

Chapter End Notes

content warning: self harm, references to child abuse by teachers

[discord!](#)

i hope you enjoyed!!! sorry for the negativity in the start note, i just really needed to address that bc it's been weighing on me for a while. thank you all for all of your support!! it means the world to me

return to the gekkeiju base

Chapter Summary

last time: izuku tells aizawa the truth as ace, lies to him as izuku, and texts todoroki

Chapter Notes

HI GAMERS first of all i want to say thank you all for all of the support. i was really blown away by the response on this last chapter and i just appreciate you all so much you're so nice to me

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

The Gekkeiju base is quiet, when Izuku steps through the doors and into the lobby. It feels strange, to be back here in the shirt and slack Miura had given him, with a black duffel bag in one hand. He'd been smart, this time, and had packed an overnight bag along with the report he'd painstakingly prepared. He just hopes he won't need the change of clothes and the toothbrush in the bag; Izuku would prefer to not spend the night here at all.

He can see Yamamoto at the front desk, her eyes on the computer screen as always. Izuku wonders about that as he walks up to the desk, his shoes clicking on the marble floor. *Maybe it's some part of her quirk*, he thinks. She doesn't look up as he stops in front of her desk.

"Midoriya," she says, fingers tapping on the keyboard. "Lord Fury is waiting for you." She hums, moving one hand to the mouse of the keyboard and clicking on something. "Different room this time. Second floor, last office at the end of the hall straight ahead of you." She types something. "I'm letting him know you're on your way up," she says, nodding. Her dark eyes remained pinned to the screen the entire time.

"T-Thank you," Izuku says, bowing slightly to her. "Um, I was wondering... is your quirk something to do with the computer?" Izuku swallows when she glances up at him, raising an eyebrow. "Y-You don't have to answer if you don't want to!" he says, holding his hands up in front of him. Yamamoto turns her gaze back to the computer screen, the edges of her lips quirking up.

"I can see through the lenses of all of the cameras on one system so long as I'm looking at the feed of at least one," she says, a hint of amusement in her voice. "That's not the entirety of it, but that's one aspect of it, yes." Izuku nods.

"That's--that's really cool," he says, and Yamamoto's smile widens slightly.

"You should get going, Midoriya," she says, still watching the screen. "I'll see you again later, I'm sure." Izuku nods quickly.

"R-Right, thank you," he says, turning on his heels and walking quickly towards the elevators. As he approaches them, he feels dread building in his stomach, but there's nothing he can do to ease

that. He can't tell himself that there's no danger, because there is. He can't tell himself that it'll be okay, because he doesn't know that it will be. All Izuku can do is take a few deep, steady breaths as he presses the elevator call button. *At least this time, I have the report.*

The elevator opens, the doors whooshing quietly. Izuku starts forward, but he freezes when his eyes meet Mr. Clean's, where the other man is stepping off of the elevator. His blue eyes are wide for just a second, before he relaxes.

"Hey, kid," he says, walking past Izuku and into the lobby. "Are you about to go see the boss man?" Izuku nods, his hands shaking where they hold his duffel bag, and Clean laughs, clapping a hand on Izuku's shoulder that makes him flinch. Clean doesn't seem to notice.

"Don't be so nervous," Clean says, giving Izuku a smile. "He's in a good mood right now," he says, before he turns and walks past Izuku, back out into the main lobby. Izuku wants to ask him what he means by that, what on *earth* that means for Izuku, but the elevator doors start to shut. Izuku darts forward, sticking a hand in between the elevator doors to stop them from closing, and by the time they're opening up again and he looks over his shoulder, Clean is out of sight.

Izuku sighs to himself and steps onto the elevator. The smooth, polished surface of everything makes his heart pound in his chest and his breath quicken slightly. He steels himself, pressing his eyes closed and telling himself that it's only to the second floor. He'll be alright.

The elevator chimes, and the door is opening quickly enough. Izuku resists the urge to run out of it. It's kind of dumb, really, that elevators of all things make him nervous. It's not like anything bad happens to him on the elevator; the bad part comes after.

The second floor is nearly identical to the third, with three hallways branching away from the elevators, one to each side and one straight in front of him. He can see the windows at the end of each hallway, showing the bright, sunny day outside. Izuku swallows around the lump in his throat and walks forward, down the hallway directly in front of him.

He can hear the sounds of a television coming from this part of the building, but it's muffled and faint. Izuku thinks that it must be in one of the first few doors in the hallway, because when he steps further down the hall, closer to the window, it grows fainter and fainter until he can't hear it at all. He comes to the last door, which is on the right side of the hall, and he pauses in front of it. It's plain looking, just like the door from last time, and it doesn't offer Izuku any hints or any warnings about what will happen once he goes inside.

Izuku knocks on the door gently, the knuckles of his index and middle finger rapping against the wood twice. He hears a rustle from inside.

"Come in, Izuku," Fury says, his voice clear and loud even through the door. Izuku swallows, turning the knob and pulling the door open.

The room inside is small, and it's set up more like an actual office than the last room. Fury is sitting in a large, red-brown leather office chair, turned to face the door. Behind him, there's three large computer monitors, their screens black. There's a mouse and keyboard on the table in front of them, all high quality and plain, without any logos or colors. There's a stack of manila folders on the other end of the rich, dark wooden table. Beside the door, there's another chair, a straight-backed, wooden chair the same color as the table except for the blue cushion on the seat and back. Izuku swallows. Fury is dressed in a dark grey suit, his blazer unbuttoned to show the dark red button down underneath.

"Have a seat," Fury says, waving to the chair. "And shut the door behind you." He rolls back in his

chair slightly, giving Izuku a little more space. Izuku's grateful; when he tugs the door shut behind him and carefully sits in the chair, his duffel bag at his feet, there's still only about three feet between his feet and Fury's.

"I've been looking forward to this," Fury says, leaning back in his chair and steepling his fingers together, his elbows resting on the chair's arm rests. "I really hope that you've got some information for me, this time." He does look to be in somewhat of a better mood than usual; his face is relaxed behind his shade in a way Izuku isn't used to. Izuku nods, leaning down to unzip the duffel bag.

"I-I got the information," he says, taking out the sheets of his report and passing them to Fury. "Sorry--sorry that they're handwritten," he says as Fury takes the sheets of paper, eyeing them carefully. "I didn't want to leave a trail on a computer." Fury holds the papers in front of him, thumbing through them slowly. Izuku feels his heart beating fast in his chest, and he wonders if it's loud enough for Fury to hear it, too.

After what feels like an eternity, Fury breathes out, lowering the papers onto his lap. There's a slight upward turn to his lips, the faintest hint of an approving smile, and Izuku feels both relief and a sharp shot of apprehension as Fury meets his eyes through the sunglasses.

"This is good work, Izuku," he says, his mismatched eyes half lidded. "Good job." Izuku swallows as Fury rests the stack of papers on his lap, then turns his chair around so he's facing the desk. He takes a manila folder, one with a few pieces of paper in it already, and he opens it, sliding Izuku's papers inside.

"I do hope you were careful not to leave any traces of your break-in," Fury says as he sets the folder back down on the stack, turning to look at Izuku. "We're trying to keep a very tight lid on information about our operations. Having the heroes know what we're up to would be inconvenient for us, that's for sure." He crosses one leg over the other, knitting his fingers together and resting them atop his top knee.

"I-I was careful," Izuku says, his voice coming out almost as a squeak. "There's--there's no way that they would catch me," he swallows, "sir." Fury nods, an approving gleam in his eye.

"Good," he says, his voice almost a purr. "Now, roll up your sleeves," he says, tipping his head to the side ever-so-slightly. Izuku balances, blinking.

"I-I-I got the--I g-got the information," he says, leaning back slightly, away from Fury. He feels his hands clench into fists in the fabric of his slacks, and he knows he's wrinkling them, but he can't get himself to relax. Across from him, Fury raises an eyebrow, a slight smile on his face.

"Oh, Izuku, I'm not going to *punish* you," Fury says, his voice sweet and smooth. "I just want to see how your burns are healing. I told you, we take care of our members." He nods. "Now, roll up your sleeve. Just the injured arm is fine."

Izuku stares back at him, swallowing. He'd known, on some level, that he'd have no choice but to show Fury his arms at some point, but he's not sure he's ready for someone to see what he'd done to his biceps. Even now, under the white dress shirt, the scabs on his arms feel fresh and raw, like they could start bleeding at any moment. Izuku thinks they probably could. He'd cut last night, after all.

He takes a deep breath and starts to roll up the sleeve of his left arm with shaking, cold fingers. He fumbles with the button of the nice, formal shirt, his fingers trembling and losing their grip. He presses his lips into a line, trying to will himself to calm down, but it doesn't work. Fury clicks his

tongue at him, rolling forward in his chair, and Izuku flinches when Fury's hand grabs the wrist of his left hand, his touch light and gentle but still every bit as terrifying. Izuku watches his arm instead of Fury, watches as Fury carefully unbuttons and rolls up Izuku sleeve, past the white, fading scars on his forearm and past the start of the cuts.

Fury lets out a small, quiet breath when the first cut shows, a dark red line in Izuku's skin. He pulls the sleeve up quickly, exposing the rest of Izuku's cuts to the light. There's a lot of them, enough that Izuku feels embarrassed for someone to see them, fresh ones criss crossed over older, scabbed-up ones. His freshest cuts are between the lines the older ones make, and they're dark red, rimmed with violet bruising. Some of them are a little deeper than normal, with red seeping out from between the edges of the wounds. Izuku swallows as Fury traces his fingers along Izuku's arms, lifting them up and looking at them. Izuku can see the red blood smeared on his pale fingertips.

"I have to say, I wasn't expecting this," Fury says, a murmur as he rubs his fingers together. Izuku glances up at him, sees the slight crease to Fury's brows. He wonders, briefly, if Fury is *worried* about him.

"S-Sorry," Izuku says, swallowing. Fury hums, releasing Izuku's arm.

"I don't think it matters much if the scar heals well," Fury says, something like amusement in his voice. "You should really try better to keep your wounds clean." He turns to his table, clicking his tongue and opening a drawer under the edge. He pulls out a small box, red and white with English words on the cover. Izuku thinks that it says *first aid*, but he isn't sure.

"R-Right," Izuku says, quietly. Fury takes out an alcohol wipe, ripping it open. He uses it to wipe his hands off, much like the last time. Izuku swallows.

"You did really good this time, Izuku," Fury says, tossing the used alcohol wipe into a small garbage can under the desk. "Do you want me to make this easier on you? I know that it can really hurt, while a wound is getting cleaned. Especially with this many of them, with so much dried blood." Fury clicks his tongue, turning and grabbing another alcohol wipe from the first aid kit. Izuku blinks.

"U-Um, what does that--what do you mean?" Izuku asks, biting at his lower lip. "How are you going to make--make it easier on me?" Fury looks up at him as he tears the packet open, an upturn to his lip as he meets Izuku's eyes.

"I could use my quirk," Fury says, lightly, like it doesn't mean anything. He presses the alcohol wipe to the bottom of Izuku's bicep, and Izuku swallows at the swell of pain in his arm, bright and sharp.

"Oh," Izuku says. "H-Heaven?" he asks, pointlessly. Fury chuckles.

"Of course. I wouldn't want to hurt you," he says, pressing the alcohol wipe to Izuku's skin more firmly. "I'd only hurt you if you needed it." Izuku resists the urge to squirm, watching as a small amount of red seeps through the white of the alcohol wipe.

"O-Okay," Izuku says, swallowing, because as much as he knows it's stupid and a bad decision and exactly what Fury wants, he wants it, too. Something about spending this time relaxed and comfortable and feeling *good* instead of spending it nervous and on edge and in pain is irresistible.

"I think that's the right decision," Fury says, and then he pulls away from Izuku for a moment. His eyes slide shut, and he pulls off his glasses, setting them behind him, on the table beside the keyboard. Izuku feels his heartbeat pick up in anticipation, his mouth suddenly dry.

“You ready?” Fury asks, his voice light, playful. Izuku nods, then remembers Fury’s eyes are shut.

“Y-Yeah,” he says, quietly, and Fury opens his eyes. Izuku meets his golden gaze, and he feels a tidal wave of soft, gentle comfort was over him, a euphoria that makes everything else fade away.

Izuku isn’t sure how much time passes, with his eyes meeting Fury’s gold one, with his vision blurring and the world melting away around him. Izuku can feel the thump of his heart in his throat, quick and heavy and thick. He can feel the pull of the air in and out of his lungs, and it feels heavier, more *full* than normal. His skin tingles, like something’s crawling over it, but it isn’t unpleasant. It feels almost like someone is dragging their fingers along his skin, like goosebumps blooming on his flesh. Izuku can feel Fury cleaning and dressing his wounds, can feel him roll up the sleeve on Izuku’s other arm, but Izuku doesn’t mind it. It feels distant, barely there at all under the thrum and glow of Fury’s quirk.

Fury says something to Izuku, his lips moving in the shapes of words, but the words don’t reach Izuku’s ears. Izuku stares dumbly back at him, and the next moment, Fury is closing his eyes. Izuku feels the world start to come back almost immediately, a heavy weight that soaks into him and drags him down. Izuku feels an unbearable, burning pain in his arms as feeling comes back to them, and then he’s going limp, sliding out of the chair. He feels Fury catch him, and then nothing at all.

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Izuku opens his eyes to a high ceiling, one with fancy, dangling lights. He blinks his eyes a couple of times, then pulls himself upright, into a sitting position. He’s strangely dizzy, his head feeling like it’s full of cotton and fog, but he can feel the texture of fabric rough beneath his hands. He swallows, blinking, and looks around. He’s on the first floor, in the sitting area by the TV, on one of the cream colored couches there. There’s a thin blanket laid over him, and sitting on the couch across from him is Fury, arms on the back of the couch cushions and his body turned toward the TV. His head is turned towards Izuku, though, with his sunglasses back on.

“Sleep well?” Fury asks, amusement in his voice. “You really don’t handle this side of my quirk very well, you know. Usually people aren’t quite so affected by the come down. It makes it fun to use on you,” He tips his head slightly to the side, as if examining Izuku. Izuku swallows, glancing down at his arms. The sleeves have been rolled back down, but when he reaches up a hand to press to his biceps, he can feel some kind of gauze underneath the fabric of the dress shirt. The wounds ache sharply.

All of Izuku aches, actually. From a bloom of dull pain at the base of his spine to a dry, searing pain in his lungs with every breath. His head is throbbing as the fog of sleep starts to fade, and his fingers prickle uncomfortably any time he touches them to anything. There’s a sort of heavy nausea in Izuku’s gut, the kind where he knows he won’t throw up, but he feels awful anyway. He flexes and unflexes his hands, looking for some outward sign of the pain he feels, but there isn’t any there.

“Oi,” Fury says, voice thick with annoyance. “I asked you a question.” Izuku snaps his head up, looking at Fury, who glowers at him through his sunglasses.

“S-Sorry,” Izuku says, his voice rough. Fury’s eyes narrow.

“Do you even remember what I asked?” Fury asks, moving his arms to fold them in front of his chest. “God, you’re so fucking useless. I’m nice to you, I take care of you, and this is what you do?” Fury shakes his head, then stands up from the couch, taking a few steps towards Izuku. Izuku blinks, his eyes opening wide with alarm, and he scrambles back along the couch, trying to get

further away from Fury.

“I-I’m really sorry,” Izuku says, his voice thick with panic. “I-I’m s-sorry, sir, it--it won’t--it won’t happen again,” he stammers, but Fury just growls under his breath, reaching a hand out and wrapping it around Izuku’s neck.

“Sorry’s not good enough,” Fury says, voice low and dark. “I don’t believe that shit. You have to prove yourself with your actions,” he says, his hands starting to squeeze Izuku’s neck. For a panicked moment, Izuku wonders how exactly he’s supposed to prove that he’s sorry for such a tiny mistake, how he’s supposed to stop himself from even messing up, but he remembers something else and it interrupts his thoughts.

“I-I can’t--can’t have--can’t leave marks,” Izuku wheezes, and Fury’s eyes narrow. “They’re--they’re gonna be s-s-suspicious,” Izuku says, and he gasps with relief when Fury releases his neck.

“That stutter is so fucking obnoxious,” Fury sneers. “I can’t leave any marks, huh?” He clicks his tongue reaching his hand back down and grabbing Izuku by the collar of his shirt. “I guess you leave me no choice. I’d really thought you might have learned, but here you are, making demands and shaking when I’m not even *doing* anything,” Fury says, gesturing his free hand at Izuku’s body, which trembles and quivers. He reaches his hand up with a sigh, grabbing his sunglasses and tugging them up, into his red hair. He opens his eyes.

For a moment, Izuku expects Heaven. He expects a rush of euphoria, a hit of calm that soaks into him, but what he feels instead is a familiar, heavy glow of pain that starts from the bones at his temples and around his eyes. He’s staring into Fury’s eye, golden and sunburst-patterned, for just a moment, and then every fiber of his being is filled with terrible, heavy pain. Izuku’s vision whites out as he feels like his limbs are dipped in flame, like his insides have been filled with thick, molten lead, glowing and slow moving and hot. Izuku feels himself collapse down onto the couch, but all he knows is pain.

Fury’s quirk is over quickly, before Izuku even has time to form the thought that he wants it to be over. He can hear his own gasping, weak breaths, can feel the too-rough fabric of the couch under his cheek, can feel the twitching and shaking of his limbs, his nerves popping with tiny bursts of lightning-sharp pain. Izuku moans, his voice shaky and laden with pain, and he hears Fury laugh in return. It’s a cackling, growing laugh, something unhinged and too loud. Izuku wants to cover his ears, wants to plug them up, but he can’t get his arms to move. He lies there on the couch, listening to Fury laugh, until he hears a cool, low voice.

“Kazuo,” Miura says, and Izuku can just barely make out her form through his blurry eyes. “What are you doing?” Her voice is accusatory, almost, but not enough for Izuku to be sure if he’d really heard that, or if he’d just imagined it.

“Punishing the insolent little brat,” Fury answers, laughter still in his voice. “He doesn’t want me leaving marks. Can you believe it, that he thought it’d be a good idea to *ask* not to mark him up? What an entitled little shit. He deserved it, Sumire.” Fury giggles, the sound low and dark and sending chills up Izuku’s spine, even though he can’t move.

“I doubt that this warranted your quirk,” Miura says, her voice flat and annoyed. “You used Heaven on him too, didn’t you? Are you trying to ruin him?” She sighs, and Izuku feels a gentle touch brush against his forehead. He flinches away from the touch, and he can see Miura jerk her hand back, like Aizawa had that one time Izuku had flinched away from his touch.

“Kid can see the future, he should have known better,” Fury pouts, turning around so his back is

facing them. “Whatever. He’s your problem, anyway. Go tuck him in, or whatever.” Fury stalks away, his footsteps echoing slightly in the open space of the first floor. Izuku hears Miura sigh, and then he feels the seat of the couch dip down beside his head.

“I’m sorry about him,” Miura says, and Izuku feels her hand slowly, gingerly come down on top of his head, resting on top of his curls. “He’s... well.” She sighs. “He’s horrible.” Her fingers move through his hair, slowly. Izuku takes a slow breath. The pain is starting to become tolerable, even though it isn’t really fading.

“Yeah,” Izuku replies, quietly, and he sees Miura look down at him, her brow creasing.

“You’re coherent,” she says, a hint of surprise in her voice. “How many times has he used Hell on you? You shouldn’t be able to speak so soon.” There’s a bruise on the underside of her jaw, and another, shaped like a hand, on her neck. Izuku recognizes the size and shape of Fury’s hand.

“The times I saw in the future still count for my tolerance, I think,” Izuku says, his voice slow and hesitant but clear. “Does--does he hurt you, t-too?” Izuku asks. He carefully pulls himself upward, into a sitting position. Miura is staring at him, a wide-eyed, deer-in-the-headlights look on her face.

“I--” She shakes her head, low pigtails whipping with the motion. “The situation is different, with me,” she says, meeting Izuku’s eyes. There’s a kind of fire in her eyes that Izuku hasn’t seen there before, for just a moment, and then she sighs. “Do you want to see Mouse?” she asks, quietly, and Izuku blinks, sitting more upright.

“C-Can I?” he asks, not even bothering to suppress the excitement in his voice. Miura nods, a small motion, and she pulls her hands into her lap.

“If you’re with me, it shouldn’t be an issue,” she says. “If you ever were to visit her without me, Manami, or Kazuo, you would be punished if you were caught on the cameras.” Izuku stares back at her. *Is she... warning me about the cameras?*

“R-Right,” Izuku says, and he watches as Miura stands up from the couch, sighing and brushing off the front of her pants. She’s wearing a pair of denim capris that reach down to her mid-calves and a neat, white house. Izuku realizes that she must have just come from the hardware store--she’s even wearing her glasses and a pair of beat-up violet converse.

“Come on,” she says, turning and walking towards where Izuku knows the elevators that lead to the basement are. Izuku gets to his feet carefully, then follows after her. He doesn’t miss the way she looks back over her shoulder with a sharp gaze, checking to see if he’s able to walk. His legs feel like jelly, and every step sends a burst of bright, hot pain through his bones and up his spine, but Izuku manages. He’s been in worse pain from own quirk before, though that wasn’t spread quite so evenly throughout his entire body like this is.

Miura leads him to the elevators, pressing the call button before Izuku is even there. By the time he walks over to the elevators, on shaky legs, the doors are sliding open. Izuku feels the familiar pang of fear when he steps through the doors, onto the basement elevator with its cracked, old floors and the metal walls. Izuku counts in his head, doing the square breathing exercise that Aizawa had taught him ages ago. Izuku can’t tell if it helps or if it just distracts him, but soon enough, the doors are opening to the lowest floor of the basement.

Seeing the familiar, cream-colored walls, the thick layered paint over the brick, sends a shot of adrenaline through Izuku’s veins, and his hands shake at his sides as he lets Miura lead him down the hallway, towards where he knows Mouse’s room is. Izuku can hear their footsteps on the dirty linoleum floor, and as they walk further and further down the hallway, he can hear muffled

singing. It grows louder as they progress, a clear, female voice singing something that Izuku can't understand the words of. After a moment of listening, Izuku thinks it might not be in Japanese at all.

"Who is that?" Izuku asks, quietly. Miura turns her head back, a slight grimace on her face.

"That's... that's Avenging Angel," Miura says, her voice low and dark. "Kazuo, he's been isolating her," she continues, sighing. "She's started to sing. I think it's to keep herself sane." Izuku blinks, watching the look of pain on Miura's face.

"What language is that?" Izuku asks, instead of asking why she's being kept alone, why she's being punished. Why they want her in the first place.

"Her--" Miura swallows. "She speaks Korean. It's probably that," Miura says, turning her head to the side slightly. "We're here." Miura stops in front of the door with the child's drawing on it, the crayon version of Sasaki, Fury, Manami, and Miura all together with the tiny drawing of Mouse. Izuku swallows as Miura pulls out a keychain from her pocket, sliding a key into the door and turning the knob.

"Mousey?" she calls, her voice gentle and quiet. "It's Sumire and--" Izuku takes a step forward.

"A-And Izuku," Izuku says, his voice quivering slightly. Miura pushes the door open the rest of the way, letting Izuku see into the room. Everything is laid out the same, with the mattress in the corner of the room covered in filthy sheets. The desk, with crayons strewn across them and the floor, coated in a thin layer of soot. Izuku trails behind Miura as she walks into the room. Mouse is sitting on the floor, a crayon in one hand and a bottle of water in the other hand. The bottle is empty, the plastic half melted where her tiny little hand is wrapped around it, the bottle streaked with ash. She squeezes it as she looks up at them, her eyes dark.

"Hi," she says, her voice small and shy. "Hi Sumire. Hi Izuku," She sets the crayon down on the floor, reaching over and picking up the water bottle with the other hand, holding it in front of her with both hands, squeezing it. The plastic crinkles, the sound filling the room. Izuku watches as she squeezes it again, her hands crunching and uncrunching the bottle, over and over again.

"Hi, Mouse," Izuku says, quietly. He feels something swell in his chest as he steps further into the room, letting Miura shut the door behind them. He takes a few steps over to Mouse, crouching down in front of her. She looks up at him as he does, her hands still massaging the empty water bottle. Izuku is struck by how *thin* she is, how tiny her arms are, practically just bone. Her head looks too large on her body, more than it is for the other kids around her age. Up close like this, Izuku can see a dark tint to the skin on her hands. He wonders if it's soot, if her hands are so dirty that they look that dark, or if it's part of her quirk.

"Izuku is okay," Mouse says, her tiny voice insistent. Izuku knows that she's asking a question, in the only way she knows how.

"I'm okay, yeah," Izuku says, a small smile creeping over his face. "How are you doing?" Mouse squeezes the water bottle, and it crackles, loud and sharp.

"Mouse is good!" Mouse chirps, beaming up at him. She doesn't really *smile*, exactly, but her face opens up some, her lips moving like she might be trying to. "Sumire got me this," she says, holding the bottle up with both of her grubby little hands. "I like them, but they break when I play with them." Her fingers flex on the bottle, and Izuku can see the warp of the bottle, the way the plastic has melted.

“You melted it?” Izuku asks. He glances back slightly, to see Miura standing in the back of the room, giving them space.

“Uhuh!” Mouse says, nodding. She stares at him, her gaze serious. “Mouse breaks things. Mouse is dangerous.” She looks up at him, holding the bottle up and giving it a little shake. “Mouse doesn’t break, though. I don’t break.” She lowers the bottle, watching Izuku with her huge, wet eyes.

“You don’t break,” Izuku echoes, his voice quiet. He wishes that he didn’t know what that meant. He wishes that her words didn’t bring back memories of listening in on a conversation between Miura and Clean, months ago. Wishes that he didn’t remember Miura saying *Kazuo got to her* and Clean saying that she *wouldn’t last long* like that. Izuku wishes that she wasn’t in this situation in the first place, but even though it hurts, Izuku is glad that he knows. *I’m going to get you out of here*, he thinks. *I’m going to get you out of here, and this will all be worth it.*

“Midoriya,” Miura says, quietly. “Wrap it up, okay? We shouldn’t spend too much time with her, or she could get in trouble.” Izuku swallows, nodding.

“Okay,” he says, his voice soft. “I’ve got to go now, Mouse.” Mouse stares up at him. She nods, her little head bobbing.

“Okay.” she echoes. “Izuku comes back when,” she says, her voice flat, the sentence ending short, like she’s realizing how close she is to a question.

“I’ll come back when I can,” Izuku promises. “I’ll try to bring you a bottle,” he says, gesturing to the plastic water bottle. She crinkles it in her hands as she nods at him. Izuku stands up slowly, backing away from her. Mouse watches him as he walks back toward the door, as Miura opens it for him and steps out first. Izuku glances back at Mouse one last time before they step back into the hallway.

Chapter End Notes

content warning: torture, abuse/manipulation, nausea, description of self harm wounds

[discord!](#)

thank you all so much again!!!! we're getting into a juicy bit soon :3c

cookies

Chapter Summary

last time: izuku gets tortured round two but he gets to see mouse so it's all okay!

Chapter Notes

HI GAMERS i almost didn't update today to give myself a break but it turns out all i want to do during a "break" is to write blnt so uh

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

When Izuku walks up to the campus gate, it's a cool and sunny morning. He'd gone home last night, slept in his own bed and eaten dinner made by his mom, but the evening had passed in a blur. His mom had doted over him in the morning, asking over and over again if he wanted her to come with him to school even though Sundays are her days off. Izuku had told her he was fine, that he'd stay fine if he was alone. He is fine, of course, the pain from yesterday having faded to a dull, echoing ache in his muscles and bones, like he'd worked out too hard or like he's recovering from a cold. It's easy to deal with, compared to the drawbacks of Izuku's own quirk.

Izuku walks towards the gate, the breeze blowing through his curls. He squints his eyes as a figure with blonde hair enters his view, just as he passes through the gate. After just a moment, just a few more steps forward, Izuku recognizes Neito, wearing a loose sweatshirt and a pair of jeans. Izuku blinks, jogging forward to meet his friend, who walks towards him with his hands in his pockets.

"Neito!" Izuku calls, a smile splitting his face. "What are you doing here?" Neito gives him a sly smile, turning to face the same direction as Izuku, walking alongside him as Izuku heads towards the dorm building.

"I came to see you," Neito says, glancing at Izuku through the sides of his eyes. "How was your weekend?"

"It was good!" Izuku says, "My mom made katsudon last night, and I went to bed early last night." It's true--Izuku had swallowed down the bowl of katsudon and gone straight to sleep. Neito doesn't need to know that Izuku had been shaky and in pain, that the whole time his mother had asked him over and over again if he was okay, asked him what had happened.

"That sounds nice," Neito says, humming. "Kendou and I baked cookies for our class. Pony gave us her recipe." Izuku blinks, looking at him.

"You can bake?" Izuku asks, surprised. Neito smirks at him, flipping his blonde hair out of his face. His bangs are getting kind of long; Izuku wonders if he'll get a haircut soon.

"I can do many, many things, Izuku," Neito says, wiggling his eyebrows. "I'm really just made of surprises." Izuku giggles, leaning into Neito to bump their shoulders together. Neito smirks at him, looking down the short distance to Izuku's face.

“Can I have one?” Izuku asks, giving Neito his best, widest smile. Neito raises an eyebrow at him, then pulls one hand out of his pocket, producing a ziploc bag with two small chocolate chip cookies in it.

“Why else would I have told you about them?” Neito asks, offering the baggie to Izuku. Izuku reaches out and takes it, smiling.

“Thanks, Neito,” he says, holding the bag to his chest. “You’re an awesome friend.” Neito tips his head back, laughing.

“Izuku, it’s just cookies,” he says, his voice slightly puzzled. Izuku shrugs, tucking the cookies into the pocket of his hoodie.

“I know,” Izuku says, glancing down at the ground. “You’ve done a lot more for me than just this, though.” He hears Neito hum beside him.

“Yeah, well. You saved my life,” Neito says, shrugging when Izuku looks up at him. “Plus, you’re fun to play cards with.” Izuku grins, and even though the smile Neito gives him in return doesn’t erase the pain in his limbs or the exhaustion in his bones, it makes his chest feel a little lighter.

--

Izuku opens the door to his dorm room closet, the soft sound of the sliding door rumbling on its tracks filling his ears. He swallows, reaching down into the cardboard box next to the entryway. It’s full of neatly folded winter clothes, but Izuku slips his hand underneath the top two sweaters and fishes out his burner phone, tucked neatly underneath. He takes it out and cradles it in his hands, holding his finger to the power button until the phone buzzes, the screen glowing to life when he flips it open.

It takes a few minutes for the loading screen to turn off, for the home screen of the phone to come on. Izuku taps on the phone a few times, opening up his messages. There’s one unread message from Miura, and Izuku takes a slow breath before he clicks it open.

Mission this week, the message starts. Shinsuke Uegaki and Ayano Takasugi. Investigate their homes, families, and who interacts with them. Report back in a week. Prioritize Uegaki if you can only complete one.

Izuku types back a quick, *Understood*, and turns the phone off with shaking hands. He slips it back under his sweaters, slides the door to the closet shut, and clenches his hands into fists. *They’re just kids*, he thinks. *They’re just kids, and they want me to find out who sees them. Who will miss them, if they’re taken.*

Izuku swallows once, twice, and then he’s all but running out of the room, his fingers shaking violently as he tries to undo the lock. Izuku can feel his breath coming quick and short in his throat as he turns it over. Izuku runs down the hallway, his socked feet slipping slightly on the ground as he tries to make it to the bathroom. He runs to the end of the hallway and down the stairs, his hand gripping the rail tightly. As he runs down the stairs, he vaguely remembers that there was a bathroom on the second floor, too, but Izuku doesn’t have time to turn back. He sprints across the short space from the staircase to the bathroom, ignoring the sound of someone calling his name in favor of slamming open the door to the bathroom and throwing himself into the first stall. He barely makes it to the toilet before he’s heaving into the bowl.

Izuku squeezes his eyes shut, feeling pressure built behind his eyes as he starts to cry, hot tears running down his face. He retches again, his head full of the knowledge that he’s going to have to

do this--that he's going to have to give the Gekkeiju information that might end with one of these two kids being captured or killed. His fingers squeeze into the cold porcelain of the toilet seat, and then he feels a warm hand come down on his shoulder, and he flinches away, hard. The hand pulls back, and Izuku turns to see Todoroki staring down at him, his eyebrows furrowed above his eyes.

"Midoriya?" Todoroki asks, his voice quiet and thick with worry. "What's wrong? Are you sick?" Izuku swallows, shaking his head and leaning back, away from the toilet. He sits back with his head resting against the wall of the stalls, his eyes sliding shut. He hears the toilet shut.

"Oi, Icyhot!" Izuku opens his eyes again, surprised to see Kacchan burst into the bathroom, his red eyes blazing and his lips in a scowl. "What the fuck are you--" he cuts himself off, his eyes widening. Izuku imagines that he must look like a mess, right now. His breathing is still too fast, too uneven, and he can feel his heart pounding in his throat. He feels cold and sweaty all at once, his head throbbing from having thrown up.

"Midoriya's sick," Todoroki says, quietly, and Izuku shakes his head again.

"N-No, I'm not," Izuku says, his voice rough from throwing up. "I-I'm--I'm just--" he swallows, squeezing his eyes shut. He has no right to be upset, no right to tell Kacchan or Todoroki *anything*. He's the one who put himself in this position. He's the one who's responsible for anything that happens to these kids.

"Breathe, you idiot," Kacchan says, his voice harsh but quiet, and Izuku nods, swallowing as he sucks in a breath.

"Has this happened to him before?" Todoroki asks, his voice a quiet murmur. Izuku hears a grunt from Kacchan.

"Yeah, but I never fuckin' dealt with it," Kacchan says. "He always went to the damn bathroom or something. Teachers didn't care." Izuku hears his breath stutter, again, as Kacchan mentions his teachers, mentions the way that when Izuku panicked in middle school, when his breath rose in his throat and his heart got crushed between his lungs, that nobody would help him. He'd excuse himself to be alone, he'd cry it out, his head pounding thick with adrenaline and fear, and then he'd return to class to get scolded for being gone so long.

"Midoriya," Todoroki's voice says, soothing and calm and right in front of Izuku's face. "Take deep breaths. You're okay." Izuku opens his eyes to see Todoroki crouched in front of him, a frown on his face, and Kacchan leaning against the wall opposite Izuku. In such a small space, the three of them are practically touching.

"Here," Kacchan says gruffly, leaning over to tug on the toilet paper in the dispenser. He pulls off a length, folds it over twice, and sticks his hand out. Izuku blinks at it, and Kacchan huffs, rolling his eyes.

"Wipe off your damn face," Kacchan says, his eyes narrowed at Izuku. "Can't feel nice, having fucking puke on your chin." Izuku takes the folded paper with a nod, wiping off his face as another sob tears through him. He feels pathetic. He's on the floor of a bathroom, crying about something he did to himself, and his friends have to help him remember how to *breathe*.

"What happened?" Todoroki asks, his voice soft. His eyes meet Izuku's wide and open. Izuku looks away.

"I-It's nothing," he says, his voice cracking. "I-I just--I just got upset." He doesn't miss the way Todoroki and Kacchan exchange a glance, Kacchan's brows furrowing and Todoroki's lips

pressing together.

“Doesn’t fucking *look* like nothing,” Kacchan mutters from his place leaned against the wall. “Do I need to kill someone?” His eyes narrow, and Izuku shakes his head.

“N-No, it’s just me,” Izuku says. His words are rushed and quick, though, and he can see worry flash in Todoroki’s eyes.

“Midoriya, is there anything we can do to help?” Todoroki asks, quietly. Izuku sees Todoroki’s eyes flicker down to Izuku’s arms, and he knows what Todoroki’s *really* asking. Izuku shakes his head. He can already feel his breathing calming down, just with the distraction of the two of them talking to him.

“I-I think I just need to rest,” Izuku whispers, and he hears a grumble from Kacchan.

“If you’re actually sick again, you’d better fucking tell us, Deku,” Kacchan says, pulling himself away from the wall. “I don’t want your dumb ass to pass out in training again.” Izuku blinks as Kacchan moves in front of him, still standing. Todoroki tips his head up to look at Kacchan as Kacchan offers Izuku a hand. Izuku takes it, and Kacchan helps haul him to his feet.

“I-I’m not sick,” Izuku says, trying to make his voice as firm as possible. “I promised Aizawa-sensei that I’d--that I’d tell him, next time,” he says, swallowing as Todoroki rises, too, gently setting a steadying hand on Izuku’s shoulder. Izuku knows he’s swaying, slightly, but between Kacchan and Todoroki, he stands without too much trouble.

“I believe you,” Todoroki says, nodding, and Kacchan clicks his tongue.

“Whatever. Let’s get your dumb ass to the couch,” he says. Izuku frowns.

“I-I really just want to go to bed,” he says, biting at his lower lip. Kacchan raises an eyebrow.

“You haven’t had dinner yet, idiot,” he says, his voice firm. “And I’m not gonna fucking leave you alone after a panic attack.”

“It wasn’t a--” Izuku starts, but Todoroki cuts him off.

“It was,” he says, his voice nearly as firm as Kacchan’s. “I agree with Bakugou. You should rest in the common area for at least a couple of hours. Then, you can go to bed.” Izuku bites the inside of his cheek, moving his gaze between Todoroki and Kacchan for a moment before replying.

“Okay,” he says, softly. His friends lead him carefully out of the bathroom and onto the soft, plush couch of the common area. The green fabric and plush cushions are nothing like the couch at the Gekkeiju base, and Izuku falls asleep within minutes.

--

Izuku makes use of Aizawa’s request for Ace to text him one night when he’s on patrol, sitting atop a fenced-in rooftop with a pretty garden and a sitting area. Izuku thinks that it might actually be illegal for him to be here, since it’s probably trespassing or something, but it’s really nice to sit on the ground beside the raised garden bed, his back leaned up against the cool brick enclosing the dirt and plants. There’s a hum of insects, the soft, earthy scent of wet soil, and a powdery, floral smell coming from the white coneflowers in the garden just behind him, mixed with the sharp clean scent of mint and sage. Izuku takes in the scent, letting it wash over him with the dampness of the September air, and then he flips open his burner phone.

The light from the screen washes over him, the white light bright enough to make him squint even through the goggles. He types Aizawa's number into his contacts, saving him as just A . He'll just reset if the Gekkeiju decide to search the phone. He types out one message first.

Hey Eraser, this is Ace. Not an emergency, but I have info for you. He reads it over twice, then sends the message. This phone doesn't have the capability to tell him when a message has been opened or not, so he doesn't know if Aizawa is even on. He snaps the phone shut and leans back against the flowerbed again. He's only barely setting his head against the brick before his phone buzzes. He blinks, picking it up and flipping it open, still leaned back. His hoodie cushions his head from the rough brick, anyway.

Didn't expect you to contact me, Aizawa's message reads. *Pleasantly surprised. What's your status?* Izuku blinks, rereading the message just as another one comes in.

Sorry, forgot you haven't had formal training. Are you okay? Aizawa's next message reads. Izuku relaxes, slightly. They don't go over status reports until next semester, when they take Communications in Heroism, and even if Izuku had had that training, Ace, isn't supposed to.

Doing fine, not in danger or injured. Izuku replies. *I know two potential targets for the Gekkeiju. You have to be subtle though, there are consequences for me if they know I leaked the info.* Izuku sends the message, swallowing around the dryness in his mouth. There's a moment's pause, and then Aizawa replies.

I'll make sure it's subtle, Aizawa replies. *Who are they?*

Shinsuke Uegaki and Ayano Takasugi , Izuku replies. *Quirks are Memory Projection and Soothing Touch respectively. Both live within the city.* Izuku's hands shake, his thumbs trembling over the buttons of the phone as he waits for a reply.

Thanks, kid. You might have just saved two lives , Aizawa's reply reads. Izuku's heart clenches in his chest.

It's my fault they know their quirks in the first place, he sends before he can think better of it. *Not really saving a life if I got them the information in the first place.* Izuku forces himself to take a breath, shaky as it is.

Not your fault, Aizawa replies. *You're doing the best you can in a difficult situation. Villains would have found a way to get the info even w/o you.* There's a slight pause, then, *You okay, kid?*

Yeah, Izuku sends back. *I'm ok. Just keep the two of them safe, please.* Izuku breathes out, tipping his head back to look up at the sky, light from below with the lights of the city. The stars shine through the haze of light, but only barely, twinkling in the tops of the navy-blue sky.

I will do my best, Aizawa says. *Stay safe.* Izuku reads the messages a few more times, before he deletes the messages from his history and shuts the burner phone off.

--

Izuku is sitting at his desk, chewing on the end of his pen. The English assignment in front is more difficult than he's used to, but he's almost done--there's just one more question, asking about grammar. He's pretty confident that he's got it right, and he's about to put down his answer when there's a knock at his door.

"Hey, Midoriya," Shinsou's voice says, and Izuku blinks, turning in his chair. The door to his room opens, just enough for Shinsou to look inside. "Can you help me on the third question on Mic's

homework? I'm stuck." Shinsou's eyes look tired, but not quite as much as normal. It's something Izuku's noticed since Shinsou moved in, since he started the term with them, but Izuku hasn't wanted to mention it. He gives Shinsou a smile.

"Sure!" he says, setting his pen down on top of his paper. "I've already got that one. Come here, I'll show you." Izuku waits as Shinsou nods slightly before walking into the room, his footsteps near silent on Izuku's rug. He stops a few feet away from Izuku's desk, only moving closer when Izuku slides his paper towards him.

"You're almost done," Shinsou says, quietly. His eyes skirt over the paper, and Izuku can see him twisting his face in concentration. "It really is an exception, then?" Shinsou asks, reaching out and tapping on the paper. "English spelling doesn't make any sense to me." His voice is frustrated, and Izuku nods, giving Shinsou a sympathetic look.

"It doesn't make sense to anyone, if that helps at all," Izuku says. "I could walk you through it, if you want?" he offers, and Shinsou blinks up at him, his violet eyes slightly surprised.

"Really?" he asks, and Izuku nods, giving him a little smile.

"Sure!" he says. "This one here, it's from a French word, so it's spelled like this, see?" Izuku taps on the page. He works through the entire worksheet with Shinsou, and by the time that they've gotten to the last problem, they're both sitting on his floor and laughing at each other's jokes.

--

"Hello, Midoriya," Hound Dog says, looking up at Izuku as Izuku steps into the small, cozy office. "How are you?" His voice is friendly, soft, and Izuku almost hates it as much as he hates the fact that he's been given mandatory counseling in the first place. The only thing keeping him sane is the fact that only the first session is mandatory, if Hound Dog doesn't think he needs more of them, or something. Izuku's prepared to reset as many times as necessary to ensure that he only has to come to this one.

"I-I'm good!" he says, giving Hound Dog a small smile as he sits in the cushy armchair positioned in front of Hound Dog's desk. "A-A little nervous, to be honest," he says, adding a shaky little laugh for good measure. It's not really acting, not really a lie, but Izuku would rather Hound Dog think he's nervous about opening up instead of realizing he's nervous his lies will be noticed.

"That's completely understandable," Hound Dog says, nodding. "Counseling can be something that's very intimidating for a lot of people. Do you have any specific questions that I could answer to help you be a little less anxious about the whole process?" Hound Dog asks, tipping his head slightly to the side. Izuku swallows, fidgeting with his hands in his lap.

"Um, sorta just, what are you gonna tell my mom and Aizawa-sensei?" Izuku asks. Hound Dog nods.

"Everything you say here stays between you and me, Midoriya. The only exception to that is if you specifically ask me to share something with your mother or teacher, or if I think you're in danger of hurting yourself or someone else." Hound Dog pauses. "Ah, and as far as self injury goes, I won't share any information you tell me with anyone else unless I think there's a significant risk to your safety or that you are suicidal. Since you're underage, there's a bit more leeway on what I can tell your mother, but I don't intend on sharing anything you're not comfortable with me sharing unless I think your life is in danger." He gives Izuku a wide smile that stretches across his canine muzzle. "Sound good?"

Izuku nods, chewing on his lower lip. He'd know from reading online that it would be something along those lines, but he had wanted to confirm from Hound Dog himself. *I still shouldn't say enough to be concerning, but if I act like everything is okay, with him knowing about my cutting, he'll know I'm lying.*

"Y-Yeah," he says. "Um, what are you looking for, exactly? To see if we need more sessions, I mean," Izuku asks. It's a gamble, because it could tip Hound Dog off to the fact that Izuku is trying to avoid more sessions, but Izuku will need that information if he resets and does this all again. Hound Dog nods, though, not looking at all put off.

"Of course," he says, pushing his reading glasses a little lower on his snout, so he's looking over them to see Izuku. "It's really if you want more sessions, or if I think that the extra support would be helpful to you. I don't want to force anyone to be here who doesn't want to, so it's mostly up to you," Hound Dog says, his voice warm, and Izuku relaxes just a touch. Hound Dog continues,

"I am a bit worried about what Aizawa shared with me about your self-injury, though," he says, his brows lowering slightly. "As well as the traumatic experiences that you and many of your peers have gone through lately. If I think that your safety might be jeopardized by having you not be in therapy, I might schedule you a few more sessions even if you're not a fan of the idea." Hound Dog must see something on Izuku's face, because he pauses, giving Izuku a smile. "It doesn't have to be with me, if that's the problem! We have another counselor who was just hired. If you'd like to switch to seeing her, just let me know."

Izuku swallows. "You--You're fine," he says, then shrugs. "I just don't really think I need to be in counseling." Hound Dog tips his head slightly.

"What makes you say that?" Hound Dog asks. Izuku bites at his lower lip.

"I-I was really scared and stuff, after USJ," Izuku says. "But since--since Aizawa-sensei and my mom have been helping me and stuff, I-I haven't hurt myself or anything." He sighs, knitting his hands together in his lap. "I know everyone is really worried about me, but I just want to focus on being a hero. I'm not really upset but everything as long as I can still do that, you know?" He looks up at Hound Dog with the last few words, sees the counselor nodding.

"Of course," he says. "I'm glad to hear you haven't been hurting yourself, Midoriya. That's really amazing progress for you to have made in such a short amount of time," Hound Dog says, his voice warm with praise, genuine praise. It almost makes Izuku feel bad for lying to him.

"T-Thanks," Izuku says, feeling his cheeks grow warm. "It w-wasn't that hard, really," he says. "I've been too busy to--to think about it much." Hound Dog nods.

"How are you coping with the workload?" he asks, picking up a pen and making a note on a notebook in front of him. "Oh, don't mind the notes," he says. "They're just for me, so that I remember everything right." Izuku nods.

"I-I think it's okay, really," Izuku says, looking up and to the side, at the bookshelves lining Hound Dog's shelves. "Like, I'm busy all of the time, b-but it's a good kind of busy. I feel like--like I'm getting something done." Izuku thinks about the time he spends on patrol, instead of sleeping, about the time he spends in his costume. It's worth the missed hours of rest and studying if he can help someone, if he can make up for what he's doing to save Mouse.

"That's good to hear," Hound Dog says, nodding. "When you're under stress that causes you distress, it's bad for your health, but a little bit of stress can actually do what you're describing. It can help you do what you need to do, and it can also help you feel a sense of accomplishment."

Izuku nods quickly, his head bobbing.

“Exactly!” he says. “It--It pushes me, but I don’t--It’s not making me cry or anything.” Izuku only cries about the Gekkeiju stuff and how useless he is, really. UA is the best part about his life. As long as Hound Dog keeps asking about that, Izuku will breeze right through this.

“Good, good,” Hound Dog says, the skin under his eyes crinkling as he smiles. “It sounds like school is something positive in your life. You and Aizawa seem pretty close. Tell me about that.” Izuku nods, smiling.

“Yeah, Aizawa-sensei--he’s really great,” Izuku says. “He taught me how to use knives and stuff, and how to fight, even though I’m quirkless. He’s really nice to me, too, even when I mess up,” Izuku says, trying to hold himself back from rambling, but it’s hard to restrain himself. “He’s a really really good hero, too, and he basically fights quirkless, so it’s amazing how strong he is.” Hound Dog nods, marking something down in his notebook.

“You mentioned how he taught you to fight, even though you’re quirkless,” Hound Dog says. “Do you view your quirklessness as something that should keep you from learning?” he asks, a thoughtful expression on his face. Izuku freezes for a second.

“Um, no--not exactly, it’s just--it’s more difficult, you know?” Izuku fidgets with his hands again, even though he’s sure that that isn’t helping his case for looking well-adjusted and sane. “I guess I’m not--not used to people wanting to help a quirkless kid.” Hound Dog nods, a sorrowful look on his features.

“Yes, the discrimination against quirkless people is really very severe, especially in your generation and younger,” Hound Dog says, tapping his pen against his notebook paper. “Have you been experiencing any kind of discrimination here at UA?” Izuku shakes his head quickly.

“No, t-the opposite, really,” Izuku says. “I-I thought at first that Aizawa-sensei didn’t like me because--because of that, but I misunderstood. Everyone is really, really nice,” he says. Hound Dog smiles.

“I’m really glad to hear that,” he says, marking something down on his paper. “Now, I want to ask you about something that might be a difficult topic for you. It’s totally fine if you’re not okay with discussing it, so just tell me if you need to stop, okay?” Hound Dog asks, giving Izuku an encouraging smile. With the way his sharp canine teeth show, though, Izuku can’t help but see it as slightly predatory.

“Um, s-sure,” Izuku says, and Hound Dog nods.

“After the summer camp, you were in the custody of a villain organization for nine days,” Hound Dog says, his voice serious and calm. “I understand that you haven’t spoken to anybody about that. I’m less interested in what happened, necessarily, and more interested in knowing how you’re doing.” He meets Izuku’s eyes, and Izuku swallows.

“I-I’m okay, I think,” Izuku says, looking down at the table. Hound Dog isn’t making any notes. “Nothing--nothing really happened, to be honest. I-I just... They let me go,” he says, shifting in his seat. “It sucked to be there, yeah, b-but I’m out now, and I’m--I don’t even really think about it.” Hound Dog nods, finally leaning down to write something Izuku can’t make out on his paper.

“I’m glad to hear that you’re doing okay,” Hound Dog says. “If that changes, please be sure to go to Aizawa or myself. There’s no shame in experiencing difficulties after such a traumatic event,” he says, giving Izuku a warm smile. Izuku blinks.

“You--you believe me?” Izuku asks. Hound Dog tips his head.

“Is there a reason I shouldn’t?” he asks, and Izuku curses himself mentally.

“No--it’s just, everyone keeps assuming that--that something’s wrong,” Izuku says, biting at his lower lip. Hound Dog hums, nodding.

“Yes, well, I trust you. I find that if you assume people are lying to you when telling the truth would be in their best interest, you end up losing their trust in you.” He smiles. “If you tell me you’re okay, I believe you. If you aren’t telling the truth, well, then I won’t judge you for it if you come back and tell me that you’ve done nothing but lie this whole time. That’s okay.” Izuku stares back at him.

“I-I’m not lying,” he says, and Hound Dog nods.

“I don’t think you are,” Hound Dog says, then glances down at his watch. “We’re out of time, unfortunately. Is there anything you wanted to ask me before we wrap things up?” Izuku shakes his head, and Hound Dog nods before continuing. “Now, I think that you’re handling all of this better than anyone could expect, but you’ve still been through a lot. I’d like to check in with you again once this semester, and then twice next semester, just to make sure that everything keeps going good. Is that okay with you?” he asks, and Izuku blinks. *Only three times? And not regularly?*

“S-Sure,” Izuku says. “I’m okay with that.” Hound Dog nods, giving him a smile.

“Glad to hear it!” he says in response. “I’ll let you know when I want to see you next, okay?”

Izuku nods. “Okay!” he says, starting to stand up from his chair when Hound Dog speaks.

“Oh, one more thing!” Hound Dog says, raising a paw. “Would you be comfortable with me telling Aizawa our plan of when to meet again? I won’t share any other details with him--it’s purely for scheduling purposes, in case you have to miss class.” Izuku nods.

“That’s fine,” Izuku says. It’ll probably make Aizawa less suspicious of him if he knows that Hound Dog only wanted to see Izuku a handful more times.

“Perfect!” Hound Dog says. “I’ll see you next time then, Midoriya. Oh, and feel free to come by anytime if you need to talk sooner. I may bark, but I never bite!” he says, laughing. Izuku grins despite himself, and he waves as he walks out of the little office.

“I-I will!” he says, turning and walking back down the hallway.

Chapter End Notes

content warnings: vomiting/illness, panic attacks, mentions of self harm

[discord!](#) please read the rules. 16+ only!

i hope you enjoyed!!!!!! i love reading y'all's comments especially whenever fury and mouse show up djfkgkhkfdjg also i hope the more comfort-y chapter was okay!! this arc is kind of slow so yeah

nighteye

Chapter Summary

last time: izuku gets some cookies, has a little freak-out, and gets some much-needed therapy

Chapter Notes

yes this is horrendously late but it's friday and i had a lot of stuff today :) i got my first covid shot though so!!!!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Izuku is hopping down a fire escape, headed towards what he *thinks* is just a guy looking through the garbage dumpster (he wants to be sure the guy isn't hiding like, drugs. Or a body.) when he hears the soft rippling of a capture weapon. Izuku ignores, for just long enough to land in front of the guy, who whips around and looks at him, his dreads whirling around his face. His hands are crab claws, and they click and clack nervously.

“Uh, are you like, a villain?” the guy asks, a nervous grimace on his face. Izuku blinks.

“Um, no,” he says awkwardly shifting his feet. “I’m a vigilante. What are you.... doing?” Now that he’s closer, Izuku is pretty sure that the guy has a bunch of eggshells and animal bones at his feet, which is kind of not what he expected at all. The guy frowns, crossing his arms (claws?) over his chest.

“I’m getting calcium, dude. I have to eat all of this stuff for my quirk,” he says, waving a hand at it, “which means I don’t have any for the garden, and I’m *not* buying fertilizer when it’s *literally* just as good to use trash.” He wrinkles his nose. “Kinda nasty, though.” Izuku nods, agreeing. There really is quite a stench coming from the garbage, like rotten fish.

“You could ask your neighbors?” Izuku offers. The guy snorts.

“Yeah, a black guy who’s a mutant type, asking for their garbage? I’m sure that will go over *really* well,” the guy says, rolling his eyes. “Sorry to disappoint, I guess. I don’t *think* this is illegal.” He clacks his claws a couple more times, and Izuku starts to walk away, grimacing awkwardly.

“Yup, uh, sorry to bother you?” he says, turning and walking from the alley. Izuku hears the guy grunt in response, and he almost forgets that he knows Aizawa is following him, until he’s almost a block from calcium dude, and the hero drops out of the sky, landing in a crouch in front of Izuku. Izuku flinches back, his hands automatically going to the knives on his belt, before he recognizes Aizawa.

“It’s just me,” Aizawa says, straightening up. His capture weapon, poofed out when he landed, retracts, wrapping around his neck with a rustling sound. “I’ve been looking for you.”

“Could have texted me,” Izuku says. He keeps the burner phone on him on patrol, in case something happens. He doesn’t *think* he’d actually call Aizawa in an emergency, but it’s nice to know he has options, at least. Aizawa raises an eyebrow at him.

“Are you sure that line is secure?” Aizawa asks. “Let me guess. The Gekkeiju gave it to you.” Izuku freezes. “Yeah, thought so.”

“I-I don’t think they’re looking at the messages,” Izuku says, lamely, and Aizawa stares back at him.

“Better safe than sorry,” he says. “I can give you another one, one that’s secure, but you need to do me a favor, first. There’s someone who wants to meet you.” Izuku blinks.

“Who?” Izuku asks, narrowing his eyes behind his reflective goggles. “Are you about to arrest me?”

“No,” Aizawa says. “Sir Nighteye. He’s underground, like me, but I’m sure you’ve heard of him.” Izuku nods, his mouth suddenly dry.

“I have,” he says. Nighteye has Foresight, for real. Izuku isn’t sure that there’s a more dangerous person for him to meet, really.

“He works with double agents a lot,” Aizawa says, sliding his hands into his pockets. “He wants to meet you, both to assess if you’re actually on the heroes’ side, and to provide you better support, if you are.” Izuku swallows.

“This isn’t optional, i-is it?” he asks. Aizawa stares at him through the slits in his goggles, his eyes narrowed.

“Not really, no,” Aizawa answers.

“Great,” Izuku mutters, swallowing, and Aizawa must be able to tell he’s anxious even under the goggles and the mask, because he sighs.

“We’re not going to arrest you, and it isn’t far from here.” Aizawa presses his lips into a thin line. “We won’t make you do anything you don’t want to do, Ace.”

“The mask--the mask stays on,” Izuku says, “and you don’t try to find out who I am.” Aizawa stares back at him, his face carefully blank.

“Kid, I’ve been trying to figure out who you are since we first met,” Aizawa says, sighing. “If I haven’t found you yet, I don’t think you meeting Nighteye is going to be what does it.” Izuku swallows.

“If he--if he looks into my future, he might figure it out,” Izuku says. Aizawa’s eyes narrow.

“What makes you say that?” he asks. Izuku squints at him.

“He could see what school I go to, where I live, my face, and more,” Izuku says, an incredulous laugh in his voice. “All information that could narrow things down way more than just my age range and quirk, which is what you have right now.” Aizawa’s shoulders move as he takes in a breath.

“Fair enough,” Aizawa says, his face moving into something that might be a grimace or a frown. “I’ll ask him not to look any further than he needs to.” Izuku nods, the motion shaky.

“Okay,” he says. “You’re not doing this just to figure out who I am?” Izuku asks, just because there’s the bitter taste of anxiety in his mouth. Aizawa sighs, shaking his head.

“No, Ace. I’m not trying to hurt you, and you’ve made it very clear that figuring out who you are would do just that.” Aizawa’s eyes are narrowed, his brows slightly furrowed over his goggles. “If I knew who you were, it would be easier to keep you safe.”

“I know,” Izuku says, his throat tight. “Where are we meeting him?” Izuku asks, swallowing. Aizawa sighs, turning to his right.

“His agency. He operates out of Musutafu,” Aizawa says. Izuku blinks.

“He does?” That’s news to Izuku. He knew that Nighteye was in the area in general, but he didn’t think he was in the same *city* as Izuku. He hasn’t seen him, not once.

Aizawa nods. “He has multiple locations, but his current project is here.” He glances down the street, takes a few steps forward before glancing back. Izuku blinks, realizing that he’s meant to follow, and he scrambles down the street after his teacher. Aizawa walks quickly, but not as fast as Izuku knows that he can. He’s walking slower, slow enough that Izuku’s shorter legs can keep up easily. Izuku can walk fast enough to keep up with his teacher’s fastest pace, he thinks, but it’s nice that Aizawa is thinking of him.

“How far is it?” Izuku asks, to fill the silence. Aizawa glances back at him, through a curtain of dark hair.

“About two minutes walk,” Aizawa answers. “I tried to get you at the closest point in your patrol, save us both some time.” Izuku blinks, nodding.

“You--you have my patrol route memorized?” Izuku asks. He didn’t think that Aizawa really cared enough to do that. It’s obvious enough that Aizawa cares a *little*, but Izuku thinks that at least part of that is the fact that Izuku’s technically breaking the law. *Not anymore, I have my license*, he reminds himself.

“Of course I do,” Aizawa says, sounding mildly surprised. “Your normal route, anyway. You know mine.” It’s not a question, but Izuku nods.

“Y-Yeah, I do,” Izuku says. He looks down, at the sidewalk that they’re walking on. The concrete is dirty, with black, smooth spots where gum has been spit onto the ground and trampled into the sidewalk by thousands and thousands of footsteps over it.

“We’re here,” Aizawa says, stopping in front of an unassuming business front. It’s a large, five story building at the corner of the street they’re walking along and the next street. Izuku glances up at it. It’s a cool grey concrete, with mirrored windows interspersed throughout. The doors Aizawa reaches over and opens are made of that same mirrored glass, and it fills Izuku with a sense of dread as he follows his teacher inside. It’s eerily reminiscent of the Gekkeiju base, even though that building is larger and the mirroring of the glass is less silver, more blue tinted.

The first floor of the building is a sparsely furnished office, with a desk in the corner, a table with two monitors on one wall, and a few bookshelves. Scattered about the room are a few more desks, but only the one in the corner is occupied. Nighteye, a tall man with lanky limbs and dark hair streaked with little pieces of gold, is sitting at the desk, his hands folded together and his elbows propped up on the table. Izuku swallows, casting a glance around the room. There’s a lot of All Might merchandise, covering the room--posters, figures, even a cardboard cut out. Izuku finds his gaze catching on Nighteye’s silver age All Might design mousepad. He wonders if that’s custom

ordered. Either way, Nighteye is a big fan.

“Eraserhead,” Nighteye says, looking over the edge of his rectangular glasses. “And Ace, I presume.” Izuku swallows, nodding. He can feel his heart pounding in his chest, beating too fast and too hard. Izuku hears a door open, and when he looks to the side, *Mirio* of all people is shutting a door, a smile on his face.

“Looks like I’m just in time, sir,” Mirio says, grinning as he leans against the shut door. He’s wearing what must be his hero costume, a tight-fitting bodysuit with a cape and everything. Izuku can see his hero name printed on the front. Izuku swallows, his mouth suddenly dry and his palms suddenly sweaty. *This is bad. This is really, really bad.*

“Looks like,” Nighteye says, his gaze still fixed on Izuku. Izuku can see that his eyes are yellow-gold, and the color sends a spark of hot fear through him. He takes a step back, his heart fluttering in his throat as he shuts his eyes, for just a second.

“Ace, you good?” Aizawa asks. Izuku opens his eyes, sees his teacher looking at him with something that might be concern. Izuku forces himself to take a deep, steadying breath.

“I’m fine,” Izuku says, and he’s so grateful that his stutter doesn’t crop up now, that it doesn’t give him away. Aizawa’s gaze on him is thoughtful, but he doesn’t say anything else.

“How old are you?” Nighteye asks, tapping his fingers together. Izuku turns to him.

“Fifty-six,” he deadpans. Nighteye raises an eyebrow at him, and Mirio chuckles as he crosses the room, moving to stand in front of Izuku.

“I’m Lemillion,” Mirio says, offering a hand to Izuku. “It’s nice to meet you, I’m a real big fan of your work.” Izuku blinks, taking Mirio’s hand and shaking it.

“Y-You are?” Izuku asks, and Mirio nods eagerly.

“Yeah! You haven’t had any training, and yet you’ve saved so many people already. I’m probably older than you, and I’ve only just now started.” He gives Izuku a sheepish grin. “I’ve been dying to meet you.”

“Oh,” Izuku says, blinking. He doesn’t know what to say, so he doesn’t say anything. Izuku wonders if Mirio can see his eyes through the reflective goggles, this close up. Mirio gives his hand a squeeze, then releases it.

“Come on,” Mirio says, looking back at him as he turns and walks further into the room, tugging a chair away from a desk. “You two are just hovering near the door. We don’t bite, you know.” Izuku nods, glancing up to look at Aizawa. His teacher looks back down at him, his eyes half lidded through his goggles. Aizawa takes a few steps further into the room, moving to stand beside a tall potted plant. Izuku swallows, walking further into the room and taking the chair that Mirio offers him. It’s cold and slightly uncomfortable, but it’s not a cushy armchair, and Izuku is okay with that. Mirio moves to stand next to Nighteye’s desk, leaning on the wall next to it. Izuku wishes he and Aizawa would sit, but at least Nighteye himself isn’t standing.

“So, Ace,” Nighteye says, leaning forward. “What, exactly, is your relationship with the Gekkeiju?” Izuku swallows, taking a slow breath to keep his heart from racing in his chest.

“I-I agreed to work for them,” Izuku says, keeping his gaze carefully on the tile floor between him and Sir Nighteye. “I want to--to get information, on how they work. So that I can help to get their p-prisoners out and to safety.” Nighteye’s eyes narrow.

“How did you know about the prisoners in the first place?” he asks. Izuku swallows.

“I-I already knew about, um, Avenging Angel going missing. And I put together from stuff I overheard while listening in on t-them on patrol that they had her. I didn’t know about Mouse until I was at their base,” Izuku says. He knows the moment that he says it that it’s a mistake. Nighteye raises one eyebrow, slowly.

“You know where their base is?” Nighteye asks. “Why have you not shared this information with us? And who is Mouse?” Izuku feels a shiver run down his spine.

“M-Mouse is--she’s a little girl,” Izuku says, his voice breaking. “She’s just a little kid, and they have her prisoner, and they hurt her and they--they *use* her,” Izuku says. He squeezes his eyes shut. “They--they t-told--” Izuku bites his lip, starts again. “If I give you t-the address, they s-said they would cut off her arm,” he says, his voice small and choked. “I can’t--I can’t do that to her.” He squeezes his hands into fists, the pads on his gloves biting into his skin. Izuku wonders if there’s metal, in the pads. It’d be a clever form of armor, and the gloves are kind of heavy. There’s a heavy pause in the room, and then Izuku hears a sigh, hears the screeching of a chair moving against tile.

He jerks his head up to see Nighteye standing, his palms down on the desk and his gaze trained on the floor. His lips are pressed into a thin line as he looks up at Izuku, then stands up fully, straightening up. It only takes him a few steps to fully cross the room, to stand in front of Izuku. Izuku jerks back instinctively, every nerve on edge. He wishes he could just get out his knife now, that he could end this conversation and just run away from Aizawa when he approached him. He sees Nighteye’s brow crease as he crouches down in front of Izuku, and Izuku flinches back again, his muscles wound tight.

“I’m not going to hurt you,” Nighteye says, and Izuku just nods. He can’t handle the yellow-gold of Nighteye’s eyes, even though it’s a brighter, lighter shade than Fury’s, not as deep or as orange. Izuku shuts his eyes, resisting the urge to pull his knees up to his chest.

“I-I’m sorry,” Izuku says. “I couldn’t--I couldn’t do that to her,” he whispers. He hears a sigh from Nighteye.

“Eraserhead, you said you thought he was in high school,” Nighteye says. “He can’t be any older than a first year.” Izuku opens his eyes to see Nighteye watching him, a weary expression on his face.

“I think he was in middle school when he first started,” Aizawa says, his voice low and gruff. “He was inactive for a few weeks around the time of entrance exams.” Izuku swallows, his mouth opening and closing as he tries to get his breathing under control.

“Ace,” Nighteye says, his voice low and even. “I need you to take a few deep breaths for me.” Izuku swallows, leaning away from Nighteye. He can’t close his eyes, because then he doesn’t *know* that it isn’t Fury in front of him, and he can’t keep them open, because then all he sees is the yellow of his eyes. Izuku tries to take a breath, but it makes a strange wheezing noise. *Definitely going to have to kill myself after this*, he thinks.

“You--your eyes,” Izuku gasps out, and Nighteye frowns, his brows creasing together.

“My eyes?” Nighteye echoes, and then he’s moving back, out of Izuku’s vision. “Eraserhead, he’s more familiar with you.” Izuku blinks, staring down at the tile floor as Nighteye moves out of his field of vision, his grey suit quickly replaced by Aizawa’s dark, loose costume.

“Ace, hey,” Aizawa says, his voice thick with worry. “You’re safe. Nobody here is going to hurt

you.” He reaches a hand up, gently resting it on Izuku’s knee, and Izuku barely even twitches. “I need you to try and breathe with me, okay? In for four seconds.” He takes an exaggerated breath, which Izuku copies. “Hold for four,” he says, and Izuku holds it, his chest feeling tight. “And out for four. Good,” he says, as Izuku breathes out, slowly. Izuku knows this, knows the square breathing, and he keeps repeating the cycle as Aizawa squeezes his knee.

“Sorry,” Izuku says, quietly. Aizawa shakes his head.

“Don’t apologize. You’re in an incredibly difficult situation right now. Anybody would be stressed.” He takes a slow breath. “Can you tell me what you meant about Nighteye’s eyes?”

Izuku nods. “One of the--of the Gekkeiju, his quirk relies on eye contact,” he says, his voice shaking. “It--It hurts. It’s *torture*. A-And his eyes are gold.” It doesn’t help, either, that Nighteye’s wearing a grey suit. It isn’t the same shade of any of Fury’s that Izuku’s seen thus far, but it’s definitely close enough to trick his brain. He sees Aizawa nod, reaching up and tugging his goggles down, so they hang around his neck. It’s the first time Izuku as Ace has seen Aizawa without the goggles, and it makes him feel a little bit like he has whiplash. There’s impressions in Aizawa’s skin where the goggles pressed into the flesh.

“That would certainly explain his reaction to me,” Nighteye says, and when Izuku glances up, he’s standing back, about six feet back from where Izuku is still sitting in the chair. Izuku feels his face heat up slightly.

“S-Sorry, you didn’t do anything to--to deserve me f-freaking out on you like that,” Izuku says, shifting in the chair. He sees Nighteye frown slightly, but that might just be his face. Still against the wall, Mirio gives him a sad smile.

“Ace, it’s really okay,” Mirio says, his voice gentle. “Sir didn’t mean to scare you, he’s just kind of mean-looking.” His lips quirk up in a smile, and Izuku can’t help but return it, even though he knows Mirio can’t see through his mask.

“Right,” Izuku says, giving himself a shake. “I-I’m okay now,” he says. “I can give you the location of the base when--when Mouse and Avenging Angel are safe,” he says, looking at Nighteye. Nighteye pauses for a moment, then nods.

“I don’t think there’s much of a chance of you being a villain,” Nighteye says, his lips set in a grim line, “but I’d like to look into your future anyway to be sure. It’s just a precaution.” Izuku swallows, nodding. He’s going to have to reset this round anyway, considering how much information he’s sure his little freak-out just gave away. He’s sure that the way he acted or the way he cried or *something* would tip either Mirio or Aizawa off to who he really was, if they were given enough time to think about it. Izuku may as well figure out what Nighteye will see if he checks Izuku’s future, while he’s at it.

“Okay,” Izuku says, swallowing to clear the snot running down the back of his throat. “What d-do you need to do?” he asks. He wishes he could wipe the drying tears off of his face around his eyes or blow his nose, but the goggles and mask stop him from doing either.

“The exact activation details are kept secret, but I’ll need to touch you,” Nighteye says, but he doesn’t move from the spot. “I’m not going to hurt you. Do you have a preference for where?” His gaze moves up and down Izuku. “You don’t have any bare skin showing, that I can see.” Izuku blinks, realizing that Nighteye is right. His ears are probably the only part of him that isn’t covered by something, and his hood at least partially hides them. Izuku nods, reaching down to tug off one of his gloves, setting it down in his lap.

He holds his hand out, palm up, and Nighteye takes a few steps toward him. Aizawa doesn't move from his spot where he's crouched on the floor, eye-level with Izuku, and Izuku's grateful for that. Nighteye reaches out, and Izuku swallows as his bare fingers brush against Izuku's skin. Their eyes meet for a moment, and then Nighteye's eyes are widening, his lips parting slightly and a small gasp escaping him.

"Aizawa," Nighteye says, his voice slightly choked. *He used Aizawa's real name* . "Restrain him," Nighteye says, and Izuku jerks back, surprised. He sees Aizawa's brow furrow.

"What?" he asks, and Nighteye is answering even before Aizawa has finished asking the question.

"He's going to kill himself," he says, voice quick and panicked. "As soon as this conversation is over, he's going to run from here and he's going to--he's going to slit his own throat," Nighteye says, his eyes on the floor. "I don't know what happened, my quirk doesn't give auditory information, but he's going to kill himself."

Aizawa doesn't waste any time, doesn't give Izuku a chance to run or fight or even to think. His capture weapon is wrapping around Izuku, thick loops of the scarf tugging tight around Izuku's torso. Izuku has just enough time to jerk his arms up, so that the scarf doesn't catch them in the first couple of loops, but another length of white, strong fabric snares around his wrists, jerking his hands together. Aizawa grimaces as he tugs at the capture weapon, and it tightens around Izuku's chest.

"What am I thinking?" Nighteye says, an incredulous laugh in his voice. He reaches up a hand, pushing hair out of his face and holding the heel of his hand to his forehead. "My quirk is never wrong. He's going to die, Eraser." From behind him, Mirio jogs forward, stopping in front of his mentor.

"How does he get out?" Mirio asks. "You had to have seen this too, right? Do how did he--" Mirio's sentence cuts off when Izuku flicks his wrist, ripping a knife from the sheath hidden under the sweater sleeve. It had been a risk, using something so similar to his hero costume as Deku, but he's so, so grateful for it now as he cuts quickly through the capture weapon around his wrists. The blade nicks the flesh of his forearm as it goes, sending a small spray of blood up into the air as Izuku twists the knife, cutting haphazardly at the capture weapon wrapped around his chest, not caring if he breaks through to his flesh underneath. He's going to die anyway, after all.

"Ace, stop!" Aizawa shouts, jerking on the capture weapon, his voice thick with panic. "We can help you, we can find a way to--"

"Don't bother," Izuku hisses, digging the knife into his own side as he cuts the weapon away. "I'm going to die anyway, and then you won't even remember." Blood starts to run down Izuku's side, and the capture weapon starts to fall apart, releasing Izuku.

Izuku turns and runs, not looking back. He doesn't hesitate even when he sees Mirio pop up next to him, just dodges the lunge that Mirio makes at him. Izuku's pushing his way through the glass doors of the building one heartbeat, and the next he's ducking into an alleyway and digging his knife into the pit of his throat, stabbing it into his windpipe and then jerking it up and to the side, to get his artery. It's only one horrible, painful second of choking and bleeding before his quirk starts to tug him away, but before he's completely gone, he sees Aizawa and Mirio turning the corner, panicked expressions on their face.

Nighteye isn't with them. Izuku supposes that he wouldn't want to watch a second time, either.

--

Izuku opens his eyes as they're walking into the building, Aizawa's hands pushing the glass doors open and Izuku hurrying into the building after him. Izuku doesn't allow himself any reaction, any kind of expression that might give away what he'd just done. He takes a slow breath, trying to steady himself as he comes to the realization. *I absolutely can't kill myself after this, or Nighteye will see me doing it, and I'll have to run again. I have to make this permanent, or I might not get away next time.*

Everything is the same as before, when they walk in, down to the expression Nighteye makes at them, to the way his voice sounds.

"Eraserhead," he says, the same careful coldness that Izuku thinks might be an act, at least partially. "And Ace, I presume."

"That's me," Izuku says, raising one hand in a little wave. He waits just a beat, knowing to expect the sound of a door opening. Izuku turns and watches Mirio step out of what looks like a stairwell, shutting the door behind him and giving them a bright grin.

"Looks like I'm just in time, sir!" Mirio says, his blue eyes moving over Izuku. Izuku waves at him, too.

"Looks like," Nighteye says. Last time, Izuku had already begun to panic at this point, confronted with Mirio and a man in a grey suit with golden eyes, but this time, Izuku knows to turn his gaze to Mirio, to take a few steps forward. Mirio moves forward too, and they meet in the center of the room.

"Hi, Ace!" Mirio says, offering a hand that Izuku gladly takes. "I've been dying to meet you. I'm kind of a big fan of yours," he says as he shakes Izuku's hand. "I'm Lemillion, by the way."

"I think I saw you on TV," Izuku says, squeezing Mirio's hand and shaking it back. "Toogata, right? You were so cool at your sports festival." Mirio's eyes widen slightly.

"Oh gosh, you watched that?" He grins brightly as they both pull their hands back. Izuku nods quickly.

"Of course! Everyone who wants to be a hero does," he says, glad that his mask hides when his face turns red. From his desk, Nighteye clears his throat.

"Let's get down to business," Nighteye says. "Ace, what exactly are you doing with the Gekkeiju?" Izuku turns to face him. He doesn't look at his eyes, instead fixing his gaze on the wall behind him, and at this distance it seems to work. Izuku makes himself take a steady breath before he speaks, and he plays his stutter stays hidden.

"I'm infiltrating them," he says, his voice calm and steady despite the nerves buzzing in his chest. "I learned that they were keeping Avenging Angel through what I overheard on my--my patrol, and since then, I've learned of a second--a second captive." Izuku pauses, giving himself a chance to bite on his tongue, the burst of sharp pain steadying him. "They call her M-Mouse, and she's only about ten. They're--they're hurting her, and they've threatened to--to hurt her, if I leak information." Izuku swallows. "I want to get them--the prisoners--out, safely, and I want the Gekkeiju to pay for what they did to t-them, and to the other people they've hurt." He takes a deep breath.

Nighteye stares back at him, his eyes narrowed, searching. Izuku takes a breath. It feels good, to finally verbalize to someone what he's doing, exactly, and what he's doing it *for*, but at the same time, it's nerve-wracking. Izuku isn't sure if Nighteye will believe him, if he'll trust that Izuku is

really on the side of the heroes. *He definitely won't without proof.*

Izuku reaches down, tugging off the glove on his left hand. He holds the glove in his right hand, and he walks towards Nighteye, his bare left hand held out, palm up again. He turns his head so that it'll look like he's making eye contact with Nighteye, even though his gaze is trained on the desk.

"Look at my future, and see for yourself," Izuku says. "But please don't--don't try and figure out who I--who I am." He squares his shoulders, swallows. "I want to keep my identity secret." He hates the tiny shake he can hear in his voice, but when he glances up at Nighteye, he can see something akin to curiosity in the man's eyes as he reaches out, his fingers brushing the surface of Izuku's palm. Their eyes meet, and Nighteye doesn't startle, this time. His eyes narrow, and he frowns slightly as he pulls his hand back. Izuku pulls his own back, sliding the glove back over it.

"Your quirk," Nighteye asks, tipping his head slightly to the side and pressing his lips together. "What is it, exactly?" Izuku turns his head to the side, looking at where Aizawa has moved to stand by that same potted plant.

"It's called Mulligan," Izuku says. "I can see possible futures when I'm in mortal danger." He sees Aizawa's brow furrow. "The 'mortal' part is kind of fuzzy, though," Izuku clarifies. Nighteye grunts.

"Hm. It's interesting, because your future becomes blurred very quickly," Nighteye says. Izuku looks back at him, blinking. "I've never seen that happen, before. I can't see clearly past a few hours, and not at all past a few days, but" he pauses, sighing and folding his hands together on the desk, "it's apparent from what I *did* see that you are not working with the villains, not for real." A slow smile spreads over his face, and Izuku feels himself relaxing, slightly.

"Oh, thank goodness," Mirio says from off to the side, chuckling. "I didn't know what I was going to do if you were bad, you know." Izuku can't help the tiny smile that creeps up his lips with that.

"I never thought for a second he would be," Aizawa says, his voice gruff. "But it's good to have confirmation."

"Right, well, it's necessary to verify these things," Nighteye says, sighing. Izuku can see some tension bleed out of his shoulders. "Ace, I must ask, how old are you?" A moment passes where Izuku doesn't respond, and Nighteye continues. "I didn't see anything that revealed your identity, but it's clear that you're not an adult." Izuku swallows.

"I-I'm sixteen," he says, and he hears Mirio whistle through his teeth. Nighteye sighs.

"Well, I can't say I expected anything older," he says. "I assume that Eraserhead has already explained to you in great detail that it would be far safer for you if you would tell us who you are, yes?" Izuku nods, but it's Aizawa who answers.

"Trust me, I've been trying to convince the kid to tell me since we've met," Aizawa says, and when Izuku glances over to him. "Best I've gotten is his quirk and him finally texting me."

"Yes, about that," Nighteye says, leaning back in his chair to open a drawer of his desk. "I have this, for you," he says, sliding a plain grey flip phone across the desk to Izuku. "It's paid for, so don't worry about that. It has my contact as well as Lemillion's and Eraserhead's. It also has a few other heroes in the area, in case the three of us are unreachable for whatever reason." He meets Izuku's eyes, and Izuku forces himself not to look away. "I trust that you'll contact us not only with information, but also if you ever require help?" His voice is serious, calm. It reminds Izuku a bit of

Aizawa, but it's still not quite the same. Izuku gets why Mirio trusts Nighteye so much, now.

"I-I will," Izuku says, reaching out and taking the phone. He tucks it into one of his pants pockets. "Thank you," he adds, and Nighteye nods.

"You're welcome," he says, something unreadable in his expression. "Our quirks are fairly similar, you know. It's likely that we will end up collaborating at some point, if you're able to become a hero." Nighteye glances over to Mirio. "I heard what you said, about wanting to be one. It's not too late for you." Izuku blinks, then nods.

"I-I know, sir," he says, not bothering to hide the slight smile that grows on his face since the mask will hide it for him. "I'm working on it."

Nighteye and Aizawa let Izuku go, as promised. As Izuku slips down the streets, as he runs along the roofs, taking a circuitous route back to UA so as to throw Aizawa off his trail if he's tailing him, his new phone sits in his pocket, heavy in a way that his Gekkeiju phone never has been.

Chapter End Notes

content warning: graphic graphic suicide, uhhhhhhh panic attacks, references to abuse and torture

[discord!](#) you won't be able to type when you first get in!! read the rules and post an intro and you'll be verified so you can talk :D also it's 16+

thank y'all so so much!!!! i know that this fic is fucking LONG and i apologize for my slow slow slow pacing but i promise we are starting to get to the MEAT of the second superarc

ideation

Chapter Summary

last time: izuku goes to meet nighteye as ace and nighteye sees him killing himself in the future. ace bullshit ensues, but izuku gets away and manages to reset. he gets a heroic burner phone to match the evil one!

Chapter Notes

HI POGCHAMPS sorry if this is shittier than usual im having cool and fun ~side effects~ from the covid shot (either that or im sick idk and idc tbh) so my brain is mush but this was a juicy boy to write

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

When Izuku slips back into his room, his hands are shaking and his face feels cold despite the relative warmth in the building and outside. It's late, at least three in the morning, and Izuku should really go to sleep. He sits himself on top of his bed, cross legged in the change of clothes he'd had in his hollow tree (a sweatshirt and shorts--he should put sweats, next time. It's cold in the middle of the night). Izuku can hear his own heartbeat rushing in his ears, and he feels pathetic.

What even is there for me to be upset about? I got away, and Nighteye trusts me, now, Izuku tells himself, but it doesn't stop the shaking in his hands. He's been avoiding thinking about it, stopping his brain from drifting to the way that there's a sort of exhausted hunger in the back of his mind, hoping and *praying* that when he goes to the tower this weekend, that Fury is happy with him. He's been trying not to think about the way that ever since Saturday, everything has felt just a little *off*, a little *wrong*. The way that he used to get at least some sense of safety from being in his room, the way that he used to feel okay when he got back to the dorm, even if he had to kill himself to get into a real sense of relaxation. It all pales, in comparison to that long, drawn out Heaven that Fury had given him.

Izuku wraps his arms around himself, swallows. He feels a lump building in his throat, because now he's thinking about that *other* thing, about the fact that when he'd killed himself in front of Aizawa and Mirio, he hadn't felt that normal rush of euphoria that comes with bleeding out. He tries to tell himself that that's okay, that it's just because it was in special circumstances and it doesn't mean that he's lost his comfort, but he can't shake the thought from his head that either Heaven or Hell has robbed him of his only comfort, of his respite.

Izuku swallows, pressing the pads of his fingers into the fabric of his sweatshirt over his biceps, into the bandages and the flesh underneath. He feels a quick bloom of pain, and that shaky tiny rush that he gets with pain this small. He lets out a sigh, but it turns into more of a hiccup. *I still have this*, he thinks to himself. *At least I still have this.*

And that's even worse, isn't it? Because Izuku has all of these people who *want* to help him, all of these people who are frustrated with him, who wish that he'd just *tell* them what was wrong.

Aizawa, for one, but also his mom and Neito and Todoroki and Kacchan and *so* many more people. Izuku thinks that Shinsou, even, with their tentative new friendship, would want to help him, if he knew what Izuku's going through.

Izuku can't tell them, though. He can't even tell Nighteye and Aizawa as Ace, can't tell them that he's died for Mouse before, that he's died in front of them. They see him as a kid, as a *child* to be protected. They don't understand that Izuku, with his horrible power, isn't *just* a vigilante, isn't *just* a hero in training. They don't understand that he's useless, without this. That if he didn't have this power, he couldn't do anything at all.

Izuku swallows back the sob building in his throat, turning and letting himself flop down onto the bed. He isn't sure if he feels rotten because it's so late at night, because he hasn't slept properly in months, or if it's because he'd gone from Fury to puking in the bathroom to killing himself in front of pro heroes. Izuku doesn't know anything, anymore. He feels like he's losing control of this, of all of this. Keeping Ace secret had been something he'd *chosen*, at first. He couldn't tell people about his quirk, but he could tell them about Mulligan, couldn't he? He could have applied to UA with a quirk and could have told Aizawa that he was Ace the moment Aizawa promised not to arrest him.

Except now, Izuku knows that he can't tell Aizawa. He knows that the Gekkeiju would find out, because there's no way Aizawa would let him leave for weekend trips if he's going right to a villain base, to be tortured. Izuku would miss a couple of meetings, and even though Aizawa and Nighteye and everyone else would try really, really hard to save Mouse and Angel, they wouldn't get there, not before the Gekkeiju killed them or hurt them or *something*, something that would be all Izuku's fault because he couldn't keep his stupid mouth shut.

Izuku feels like he's drowning. He sobs into the palm of his hand, trying not to make too much noise as tears roll down his face and onto his bedspread. He knows that Shinsou is up late, most nights, and he doesn't want the other student to find out, to come to talk to Izuku or try to ask what's wrong. *I couldn't even tell him, could I?* Izuku is so deep in this web of lies and secrets and hidden things that he's trapped, that he can't move an inch. He wishes there was a way out, but there isn't.

Izuku screws his eyes shut as the realization hits him. He doesn't have *any* way out, not even the way that most people have, even when they have no other choice. Izuku couldn't kill himself to escape. He couldn't commit suicide and hope that there's an afterlife that treats him better than the real world did. Izuku can't get out. He's really, truly, stuck.

Izuku tries to suck in a breath, but it turns into a wheeze, whistling around the hand that's pressed over his mouth. *I wish I could kill myself*, he realizes. *I wish I could die, for real*. Something burns in his chest when he thinks that, because it's something that he hasn't thought, hasn't *really* thought about dying for real, not since he first jumped from that roof after talking with All Might. And even then, even that time, he'd done it half hoping that he came back, hadn't he? Izuku hasn't felt this pit in the bottom of his gut, this feeling over just wanting everything to *stop*, to slow to a halt and never pick back up, since he found his quirk.

The only thing that Izuku can think to do is to kill himself, of course. He lies on his bed, crying through the fingers he has covering his mouth, and he thinks about hanging himself, about slitting his wrists and bleeding out, slowly. He thinks about taking something, like that time with the pills, or maybe combining all three methods. Izuku wants to do something drastic, something that would hurt his body, something that would tear him up and rip him to shreds. He wants something that will give him that rush of endorphins, that release.

Izuku also wants to die. He wants to die and stay dead, and he isn't sure of how his quirk works. He's never killed himself and hoped that he *stayed* down before, never even thought it, and Izuku doesn't know if just wanting it on some level will keep him dead. He doesn't know if he would come back or not, if he were to kill himself, now, and it makes his chest feel tight and sick. The only way he knows to handle this, to deal with himself when he's a mess like this, is to hurt himself, to kill himself and rewind, reset. And now he isn't even sure he can do that. Is it worth the risk, of him not coming back at all? Is it worth the chance of escaping before he has the chance to really think it through, to be *sure* ? Izuku doesn't know.

Izuku forces a deep breath into his lungs, thick and heavy and sitting there like iron coating his chest. He pulls himself upright, pulls himself into a sitting position so slowly that he's starting to wonder if he'll die of dehydration from crying before he manages to do what he wants to. He steps off of the bed, hand still pressed to his mouth to stop himself from making any noise, and he slips out of his room, unlocking and locking the door behind him with shaking fingers.

The hallway is dark and quiet, and the only lights illuminating the space are the line of small, emergency lights that trail along the bottom corner where the wall meets the floor. Izuku walks, quickly, through the hallway and to the stairs, taking them two at a time. He doesn't really care if he trips; it's only one flight of stairs, for one, and it's not like it would be a bad injury, for him. Izuku hurries through the common area, grateful that it's empty. He's not surprised, really; he's probably the only one in 1-A messed up enough to be having a mental breakdown right now.

Izuku tugs open the door to the outside, and he realizes that he's barefoot, still, when the concrete of the stairs rubs roughly on the bottoms of his feet. Izuku uses the sensation to ground him, as he hurries from 1-A's dorm to the next door building, 1-B's. He's only been here a few times, but he knows where Neito's room is by heart, if only from all of the times that Neito complains about having to have upstairs neighbors *and* having to climb so many stairs. There's nobody in this common room, either. It's identical to 1-A's dorm, so Izuku knows exactly where to go to run up the stairs. He clenches his teeth at the echoing noises of footsteps, and he slows down the closer and closer he gets to the fourth floor. When he finally steps off of the stairs, walking to the end of the hall where he knows Neito's room is, he's shuffling his feet, anxiety building in his chest.

This is stupid , Izuku thinks, pulling his hand away from his mouth and taking a shaky breath as he stares at Neito's door. He's died so many times before; the fact that he wants to die now isn't anything special. This isn't Neito's problem, either, and Izuku doesn't want to burden him with this, doesn't want to put this on Neito's shoulders.

But the thing is, Izuku knows that if he leaves now, if he goes back down the stairs and across the short distance to his building, if he goes back to his room and locks the door, he *will* hurt himself. He'll cut his upper arms open, watch the blood flow down and drip off onto the floor. He'll slice open his wrists, just enough that he'll die, but not enough for it to be quick. While he waits, he'll carve himself up with his knives, the same ones he's supposed to use to protect people. Izuku isn't sure that what he's done, so far, has protected *anyone* . All he's done is give Mouse new threats, threats of her losing an arm and being in pain if Izuku messes up. All he's done is give Aizawa pain, made him worry about Izuku when Izuku isn't worthy of that. Izuku *can't die*. Nobody should worry about him; there's no point.

Izuku takes a slow, deep breath, and he knocks on Neito's door, rapping his knuckles against the wood. He's worried, for a moment, that he's knocked too quietly for Neito to hear him, but then he hears a groan from within the room. He swallows down the guilt that he feels, because he's clearly just woken Neito up.

“Comin’” Neito says, his voice slurred with sleep, and then Izuku hears shuffling in the room. He

waits for a moment, hearing the lock turn before a sleepy-looking Neito opens the door, wearing a white t-shirt and a pair of sleep shorts made of soft grey fabric. He rubs at his eyes, already speaking as the door opens.

“Kendou, I’m sleeping, I--” Neito cuts himself off, his face quickly morphing from something like sleepy confusion to alarm. “Izuku?” He opens the door wider, taking a step out, towards Izuku. “What’s wrong?” Izuku swallows.

“C-Can I come in?” Izuku asks, shifting on his feet. “I-I was--I was going to--” he shakes his head, biting his lip, and Neito is already stepping back, opening the door and letting Izuku in. His brows are knitted together, above his blue eyes, as he shuts the door behind Izuku.

“Were you--were you going to kill yourself?” Neito asks, his voice hushed. Izuku nods, his head bobbing shakily.

“Y-Yeah,” Izuku breathes, and Neito sucks in a sharp breath.

“Can I hug you?” Neito asks, and Izuku nods again, quickly. Neito doesn’t waste a moment, leaning forward and pulling Izuku into his arms, his hands gripping tightly to the back of Izuku’s shirt. Izuku ignores the prickling, crawling dread that fills him at the touch of another person, instead focusing on matching his breathing to Neito’s. He wraps his arms around Neito, too, soaking in the other boy’s warmth, and he lets himself breathe for a moment before Neito speaks, murmuring into the top of Izuku’s head.

“Did something happen?” he asks, quietly, his breath warm on Izuku’s scalp. Izuku grips Neito tighter, his arms wrapped around Neito’s chest.

“Yeah, but I-I can’t--I can’t tell you about it,” Izuku says, miserably. He can hear the fear in his own voice, can hear it in the quiver and the hesitance in his tone. Neito’s hands grip harder in the back of Izuku’s shirt, pulling him closer into Neito’s chest.

“Okay,” Neito says, breathing out. “Okay. You were going to kill yourself,” he says, and Izuku knows he’s meant to confirm or deny. He nods.

“I-I was, but I didn’t--I didn’t *want* to,” Izuku says, his voice cracking. Neito nods, and Izuku can feel the motion against his skin.

“Izuku, you need help,” Neito says, quietly. “You can’t-- *I* can’t deal with this alone.” Izuku can *hear* Neito swallow, can feel it, too. “You have to tell someone, at least about the self harm. You can--you can tell Hound Dog that you’re hurting yourself, that’s what the suicide is for you, right? Because you don’t actually die.” Izuku swallows. *I can’t tell him that I want to die for real, I can’t. It’s too much to ask of him.*

“I-I guess,” Izuku says, his voice wet. “I don’t--I don’t want to talk to Hound Dog,” he says, and Neito’s hands relax from where they’re clenched in Izuku shirt, moving to rub circles on his back instead.

“Have you had your mandatory session already?” Neito asks. “You could tell him then.” Izuku swallows.

“I-I already had it, and I--I just convinced him everything was fine.” Izuku bites at his lower lip, leaning more heavily into his friend. “I-I’m sorry, I should--I should have just--”

“Don’t apologize for coming here instead,” Neito says, his voice quick and harsh. “Don’t you dare.” He pulls Izuku in as Izuku tries to pull back slightly, and Izuku lets him. “I’m not saying this

because I don't *care* , Izuku, but I can't--I'm not qualified to help you with this, you know that, right?" Neito sighs. "You've met Hound Dog, you know he's nice. You can--you can tell him, and he can help."

"I can't tell him everything," Izuku says, and he knows that that means far more than even *Neito* knows. Izuku feels like he's sinking into a pit of bubbling tar, unable to even move for the black sinking into his soul. Even Neito can't know everything, and Neito can't help him.

"You can tell him *something* ," Neito says. Izuku sobs, wetly, into Neito's shoulder, and Neito shushes him quietly, on hand moving up to rest, warm and comfortable on the back of Izuku's neck. His other hand keeps rubbing slow, soothing circles into Izuku's back as Neito holds him.

"When I was in middle school," Neito starts, his voice quiet and hesitant. "I almost--I almost killed myself." It's almost a whisper, but Izuku hears it. He pulls back, looking at Neito's face, at the pain in his features.

"Neito--" Izuku starts, but Neito shakes his head, cutting him off.

"I almost killed myself, but I told my older brother instead," Neito says, quietly, "and he told my parents and made me get help. Vlad-sensei knows, and so does Hound Dog," Neito continues, and Izuku watches the tears build in his friend's blue eyes. "And it helps, Izuku. It doesn't fix it, but it *helps* . And I--I'm worried that if I don't make *you* get help, it's going to end with you dead for real," he says, his voice trailing off into a whisper at the end. Izuku stares at him, watching the tears spill out of his blue eyes, rolling onto his cheeks and down his face, and Izuku feels like he's been punched in the gut.

"Okay," Izuku says, because he can't hurt Neito like this, not anymore. "I'll--I'll talk to Hound Dog. And Aizawa-sensei," Izuku whispers. He hadn't even *asked* . Neito had been so patient, so kind with him, and Izuku hadn't even asked if Neito had the same problems that he did, if Neito was okay. Izuku has been so, so selfish. He watches, with guilt burning hot and ugly in his gut, as Neito's lips quirk into a small smile, and he pulls Izuku in tight.

"Good," he says, and Izuku is squeezed into his chest. "Izuku, I--you're my best friend, okay? You saved my life, and now, we just--you just make me happy." He laughs, something thick with tears. "And I can't lose you. So you *have* to take care of yourself." Izuku nods into his neck, letting Neito hug him tight and hold him. Izuku let's Neito hold him, and it feel so good that Izuku can't take it. He can't bear what he's doing, that he's still lying to Neito, even, out of everyone. That nobody, not even his closest friend, knows the truth, the *whole* truth.

Izuku realizes, as his friend holds him and talks him down from hurting himself, that he is well and truly alone.

--

When Izuku drags himself out of bed the next morning, his head is pounding from lack of sleep and his eyes are sore from crying so much. He feels like a towel that's been wrung out, like he's been put through a meat grinder for his emotions. He pulls himself from his bed, letting the light that leaks out from behind his curtain wash over him. He tugs the curtain open just a few feet, looking out the window and over the balcony, at the forested part of the campus, where he's hiding his knives and his costume.

Izuku takes a slow, deep breath, and he steels himself. He dresses in the clothing he needs to wear for the day in a haze. He'd never ended up purchasing a summer uniform at all, and now that it's getting colder, the longer sleeves of the winter uniform aren't as hard to bear as before. Izuku

knows that he'd grow cold in the classroom, without them, or at least that's what he tells himself as he tugs his shirt on, yanking it down over the bandages on his arms, still there from when Fury had cleaned him up. He feels kind of sick, looking at them. Neito hadn't let him go last night, not until Izuku was feeling better, until he promised that he wouldn't hurt himself, not even a little bit.

Izuku kind of wishes he had, but he can't bring himself to hurt his friend in that way. His mind is still heavy with what he'd put together last night, what he'd finally admitted to himself. Izuku is alone. No matter how much people care about him, no matter how much he's willing to help others, to protect them, he's separated from them by the barrier he's built, that he has no choice but to leave up. Izuku will be alone, until he can finally, finally save Mouse from the Gekkeiju.

Izuku gets through his classes in a haze. It feels like he's in another world from his body, like he's existing on a separate plane altogether. He drifts through his classes, writing messy, illegible notes that he knows don't make any sense. He doesn't raise his hand, doesn't answer questions even when he knows the answers to them. He just doesn't see the point. He's so far away from his classmates. They've been through so much, with the USJ and the attack on the training camp, but it still doesn't compare to what Izuku's been through in this same short time.

Izuku figures this will end with him dead, anyway. He doubts that he'll be the one to finally do himself in, since he's not even sure if resetting over and over again would be enough to kill him for real, or if he just would get sicker. At the end of all of this, though, he's sure someone will do *something* to put him down. He'll have his quirk taken and he'll be killed, or he'll get tied up in some basement somewhere, doomed to reset in the prison over and over again with no escape. Why would he need to pay attention in English? Why would he need to focus in hero ethics? Izuku just stares at the board as all of his teachers lecture, and he lets himself drift, distant and faded in his own mind.

It's at the end of hero ethics, Izuku's last class of the day on Wednesdays, that Izuku is going to finally, *finally* be able to do what he hadn't done last night. He'll open a vein or two, sit in his dorm room, and let himself bleed out until he doesn't feel so rotten anymore, until he doesn't feel fuzzy and sick and strange. He'll hurt himself until he isn't daydreaming of Heaven and of dying for real. He'll cut the guilt and the pain and the hurt out of himself, if that's what it takes.

Except, as Izuku stands and starts to collect his things, stacking his notebook and the handout Aizawa had given them on top of one another, he hears Aizawa clear his throat from the front of the room. Izuku knows that he's lagging behind, that his classmates have, for the most part, left to return back to the dorms, but he doesn't think he has it in him to rush. He glances up at his teacher.

"Midoriya," Aizawa says, a hint of a crease to his brow. "Is everything okay? You've been unusually quiet today," he says, and Izuku can't help but feel a pang of *something* in his chest, like butterflies in his stomach at the fact that his teacher cares. Izuku wishes he could tell him the truth, but the lies feel like a prison around him, like bricks weighing down heavy on his shoulders.

"I'm..." Izuku starts to say that he's okay, but then he remembers what Neito had said to him last night, about therapy. What Izuku had promised he would do. Izuku doesn't want to add one more lie to the ever-growing mountain of them.

"Can--can I have another session with Hound Dog?" Izuku asks, his throat dry and his words raspy from it. He sees concern on Aizawa's face, and his teacher steps out from behind his desk, taking a few steps toward Izuku. Izuku hopes that he doesn't try to touch Izuku--Izuku is too tired to deal with the way that he'll freak out, if that happens.

"Of course you can," Aizawa answers, carefully, slowly. "Can I ask what's going on? I understand that Hound Dog thought you were stable and didn't need additional sessions." Izuku swallows,

looking at the surface of his desk instead of at his teacher.

“I... I lied to him, um the--the whole session,” Izuku says. “I’m not--I’m not okay at all, right now,” he says, his voice barely above a whisper. He hears Aizawa sigh, something dark and worried on his face, in the crease of his brows and the way his lips thin slightly.

“Thank you for telling me, Midoriya,” Aizawa says. “I’ll let him know right away, but I have to ask, are you safe right now?” Izuku blinks, looking up at him.

“What--what do you mean?” he asks. Aizawa stares at him seriously.

“Are you currently in danger of hurting yourself?” Aizawa asks. Izuku stares back at him.

“I don’t--I don’t think so,” Izuku says, his voice small, because he wants to confide in Aizawa, wants to tell his teacher that the only thing he wants to do right now is hurt himself over and over and over again, but he also doesn’t want Aizawa to *stop* him from doing that. He wants the comfort and the reassurances, and then he wants to hurt himself anyway.

“I have some papers to grade,” Aizawa says, watching Izuku carefully. “It would make me feel better if you hung out with me, just for a little while,” he says. Izuku nods, shakily.

“I-I don’t think I can talk about it,” Izuku says, and Aizawa’s face stays flat as he watches Izuku.

“That’s fine,” Aizawa says, turning back to his desk and picking up his bag. “Does the common room of your dorm work okay, or would you prefer we go somewhere more private?” Aizawa asks, slinging the strap of his bag over his shoulder. Izuku’s seen him hanging out in the common area of their dorm plenty before, and it wouldn’t look too odd if Izuku stayed in the common area, too.

“That works f-for me,” Izuku says. He follows his teacher back to the dorms, and Aizawa stays with him for a few hours, until it’s getting late and Izuku reassures him that he’s feeling better, that he’s fine. Even if Izuku kills himself that night, he thinks he feels a little better by the time he goes to bed than when he’d woken up.

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Going out as Ace that night probably isn’t a good idea, but Izuku isn’t sure he has much of a choice. He needs to start gathering information on the two kids he’d been tasked with investigating, or Mouse would *definitely* suffer for it. Or him, but Izuku has honestly just kind of accepted that as the reality of his situation, at this point. He’s going to mess up with Fury, going to misread some subtle clue or react wrong, and Fury will hurt him. It’s better if he expects it, so he isn’t caught off guard.

Knowing that he doesn’t have a choice doesn’t exactly erase the guilt that burns heavy in Izuku’s stomach as he watches the Uegaki’s house, laying down on top of a roof not far from their house. It’s a nicely sized family home, and Izuku can see lights on in one of the upstairs bedrooms, despite the fact that it’s well past midnight. He’s not sure if it’s Shinsuke’s parents or an older sibling, though, because the files on the kids had only talked about the parents and their quirks, not the actual structure of the families. It’s only been one evening, but Izuku can already tell that Shinsuke and the Uegakis will be safe--safe enough, anyway.

He’d gotten the impression that the Gekkeiju wants kids who won’t be missed, who won’t create a large investigation into the disappearances, and Shinsuke Uegaki would definitely raise at least *some* fuss. His family has to have had money at some point, for one thing, to have a two story

home with a yard in this part of the city. That, and there are three cars parked in the driveway, and there could be another in the closed garage. Izuku bets that Shinsuke has at least one older sibling who's an adult, and both of his parents at home. It doesn't mean that Shinsuke's life is nice or pretty or easy, but it means that someone will notice if he's gone. The happy, smiling four-year old in the picture probably won't be a viable target for the Gekkeiju.

Izuku watches, letting his eyes slide half-closed as a breeze rolls over the yard, rustling the trees in the backyard. Izuku wonders how a family like this, with a nice house and nice cars, ended up using the free quirk counseling at Death Arm's place. Did something happen, that cost them their money? Did somebody get injured, or lose a job? It makes Izuku's heart ache in his chest, because it reminds him that even if he saves people from villains, even if he stops people from being beaten or robbed in alleyways, he can't save everyone from everything. Sometimes, when bad things happen, they are unfair and unavoidable and silent. Sometimes, when bad things happen, they are to good people with good intentions.

Izuku feels like it'll be okay to tell the Gekkeiju the truth about Shinsuke Uegaki. He can only hope that the other child on the target list is as secure as Shinsuke is.

Chapter End Notes

content warning: suicidal thoughts (like, fr suicide), self harm, dissociation

[discord!](#) (read rules, 16+ only)

i hope you enjoyed!!!! ik it probably doesn't feel like it but we actually are progressing through plot dfjghdkfj

talent

Chapter Summary

last time: izuku has a mental breakdown. he talks to neito and then to aizawa, who agrees to get him help

Chapter Notes

pog sorry this is shorter than usual i need to do homed work

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Izuku feels his face already starting to burn with embarrassment as he steps into Hound Dog's office through the open door. Hound Dog is watching him, his paws neatly folded over one another and reading glasses low on his snout. He gives Izuku a warm smile when he walks in.

"Hi, Midoriya," Hound Dog says. "I'm glad you could make it in to see me today. Why don't you have a seat, and we can get started?" He waves a paw at the same seat that Izuku had sat in last time, and Izuku sits down, hesitantly. Hound Dog doesn't look impatient, not in the slightest.

"Um," Izuku starts, swallowing to clear the stickiness of anxiety from his throat. "What did--what did Aizawa-sensei tell you?"

"Just that you had let him know that you weren't doing well and that you wanted to have another appointment with me," Hound Dog says, his voice light and friendly. "Why don't you tell me a little bit about what's going on?" Izuku nods, shakily, and he looks down to his hands in his lap.

"I, uh--last time, I wasn't--I wasn't completely honest," Izuku says, chewing on his lower lip. "Neito, um, he t-told me that I should talk to you, and I-I thought--I thought I should give it another try," he says, twisting his hands together in his lap. Hound Dog nods, humming thoughtfully.

"I'm glad that you decided to come back, then. Would you be able to tell me what you weren't honest about?" he asks, and when Izuku looks up at him, his face is as warm and non-judgemental as always.

"You're n-not mad at me?" Izuku asks. "For--for lying?" Hound dog shakes his head.

"No, I'm not," Hound Dog says, simply. "I'm just happy that you've decided to be honest, now. I want you to get whatever help you need, and that's it. It doesn't bother me if you lied in the past." He gives Izuku an encouraging smile, and Izuku nods, taking a shaky breath in through his mouth.

"O-Okay," Izuku says. "I, um. I'm still--I'm still hurting myself," he says. It feels like a heavy weight in his throat, like something big and ugly he has to spit up. He wants to take it back the moment he says it, wants to run from this and lie and keep it all close to his chest. He's not used to being honest, and it's too vulnerable for him, too exposed.

“I’m sorry to hear that, but I’m glad you told me,” Hound Dog says, calmly, his voice without any hint of judgement. Izuku feels judged, anyway. “Do you mind telling me how you’ve been hurting yourself?” Izuku swallows.

“I-I, um. I would--I don’t want to say,” he says, looking down at his lap and twisting his fingers together. The pressure on his fingers helps him, brings him back to his body, helps to soothe his breathing. He hears a soft sound of a drawer opening, and Izuku glances up to see Hound Dog producing a stress ball from a drawer in his desk. It’s one of the clear ones, with the smaller, squishy beads inside, and the beads are a mixture of green and blue. Hound Dog holds it out, offering it to him, and Izuku takes it.

“T-Thanks,” he says, softly, and Hound Dog gives him a slight smile.

“You’re welcome,” he says. “And you don’t have to tell me anything you’re not comfortable with, okay?” He gives Izuku a reassuring smile, and Izuku nods, hesitantly as he starts to fidget with the stress ball instead of twisting his fingers together like he normally does. The stress ball feels different, but Izuku isn’t sure if it’s worse or not yet.

“Okay,” Izuku says, quietly. Hound Dog nods.

“So, to start off with, I do want to ask you if you’ve been at all considering or thinking about suicide. I know that it can be scary to answer that question, but it’s really important for your safety that, if you’re suicidal, we get you help right away, okay?” Hound Dog says, and Izuku nods, shakily. He knows how he has to answer this; he can’t continue what he’s doing to save Mouse if he’s in hospital, after all.

“I’m not suicidal,” Izuku says, his voice small but clear. Hound Dog nods, that small smile still on his face.

“I’m glad to hear that, Midoriya,” Hound Dog says. “With that out of the way, do you mind telling why you harm yourself?” Izuku must make a face, because Hound Dog clarifies, “Knowing why you self harm will make it easier for us to figure out how to move you towards stopping.” Izuku nods, shaky.

“I, um, I-I like how it feels,” he says, staring at the stress ball he holds in his lap. “It’s--it feels good. I know that’s strange, but that’s why.”

“That’s a common experience,” Hound Dog says. “People wouldn’t do it if it didn’t make them feel better.” He gives Izuku a reassuring smile. “Is it something you do when you’re feeling bad, then?” Izuku nods, slowly.

“It’s, um, I do it when I’m upset, mostly,” he says, squishing the stress ball between his fingers, feeling the little jelly beads inside sliding and moving. “It helps to calm--to calm me down,” Izuku says. He wonders if he could pop one of these beads, if he tried hard enough.

“It sounds like you’re using it as a coping mechanism, to help regulate your emotions,” Hound Dog says. “Does that sound right to you?” Izuku nods.

“Y-Yeah, it does,” he says. Hound Dog leans forward, making a note on his paper. “I, um, kind of don’t want to stop?” Izuku swallows, biting on the inside of his cheek. He doesn’t look to see what expression Hound Dog is making, but he’s sure it can’t be good.

“That makes perfect sense, considering that it helps you to feel better,” Hound Dog says. “I’d like to work on getting you some alternative coping methods, things that don’t hurt you, and we can

work on slowly weaning you off of the self harm and replacing it with other things that make you feel better.” He taps his pen against the paper. “Is that okay?” Izuku keeps his eyes on his lap, on the stress ball.

“I’m willing to--to give it a try,” Izuku says. He doubts that any coping mechanism that Hound Dog gives him could work as well as bleeding out does, but he’s not going to tell Hound Dog that he doesn’t believe it’ll work. It feels kind of stupid, to be sitting here and talking about getting Izuku healthier coping mechanisms, when Izuku is going to get hurt either way, either by himself or someone else.

“I’m glad to hear that,” Hound Dog says. “And let me know if something we try isn’t working, okay?” He gives Izuku a soft smile. “I don’t want to waste your time on something that isn’t helping you.” Izuku nods, shakily.

“I guess I-I just wish that I didn’t--didn’t feel bad in the first place,” Izuku says. He clenches one hand on the stress ball, squeezing it hard. “It’s dumb. I-I don’t--I don’t have a reason to be this upset all the time,” he says. Izuku shouldn’t be this upset. He should be stronger than this. He’s not the one who’s being kept in solitary isolation, not the one who’s getting her arms burned and being forced to kill people with her quirk.

“Your feelings aren’t dumb,” Hound Dog says, his voice soft but firm. “Sometimes, you may not understand why you feel an emotion, but that doesn’t mean it isn’t valid or that it doesn’t serve a purpose.” Izuku nods, not looking up at him.

“R-Right,” Izuku says. His throat feels too tight. Hound Dog seems to notice, because he doesn’t say anything for a moment, like he’s letting Izuku catch his breath.

“Midoriya,” he says after that pause, his voice gentle. “I know that it’s hard to deal with this, and I know it feels like there’s a lot being thrown at you all at once, but things *will* improve. It just takes time.” Izuku clanges up at Hound Dog, sees the serious look on his face.

“Okay,” Izuku says, because he doesn’t know how else to respond.

“Okay,” Hound Dog echoes, a soft smile on his lips. “To start with, I want you to try and think about what else you could do instead of self harm. Things like taking a shower, or making hot tea, that aren’t harmful to you but might make you feel better. I want you to have ten things by our meeting next week, okay?” Izuku nods.

“I-I’ll try,” Izuku replies. He thinks he’ll give it a shot, just on the off chance that it helps, but it feels pointless to Izuku. It feels like a stupid exercise, like a stupid game. He feels like a stupid kid as he leaves Hound Dog’s office after the session wraps up, that stupid stress ball still gripped in his hands.

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Izuku is thankful for the fact that Aizawa isn’t treating him any different during training, even though Izuku had told him he wasn’t doing well, and he’s pretty sure that Aizawa is worried about him. Aizawa still gives him orders as usual, still tells him when there’s something off about his form or when he does something that could get him hurt later on. Izuku appreciates it; he doesn’t want to be treated like he’s fragile, when he really isn’t.

They’ve only just finished warming up today, and Izuku is stretching his arms out in front of him, with Shinsou leaning down to touch his toes beside Izuku when the door to the gym opens, letting in some of the bright afternoon sunlight. Izuku has to squint to make out who’s walking inside, but

even backlit, Ema and Haruta's ears give them away. Maka is just behind them, wielding a popsicle. Izuku's seen her with a lot of those, lately, and he wonders if they'll slow down as the weather cools off.

"I was starting to wonder if you three had gotten lost," Aizawa says, turning to look at them. Aizawa, Shinsou, and Izuku are standing in the middle of the foam-mat area of the gym, barefoot. Izuku and Shinsou are in their sports uniforms, and Aizawa is in a white t-shirt and grey sweats, his capture weapon wound around his neck.

"Nah," Maka says, sighing. "I needed to shower," she says, and Izuku can tell that her short brown curls are damp. She's wearing the sports uniform, too, but Ema and Haruta are dressed in casual clothing, much like Aizawa is.

"Did something happen?" Aizawa asks, his gaze sharpening. Izuku recognizes that look, a mixture of concern and alarm that means Aizawa is trying to decide if he needs to be scolding someone or protecting them. Maka shrugs lazily, taking a bite out of her popsicle, the inside of her mouth stained bright cherry red from the dye.

"Nothing important," Maka says. "It's fine now, so you can stop worrying. You're going to get even more wrinkles if you keep making that face." She raises an eyebrow at Aizawa, her lips quirking up in a smirk. Aizawa sighs, rolling his eyes.

"You're lucky I can't give you detention anymore," he says, his eyes moving over the whole group. "I want to work on a couple of different things today. I heard about the quirk training you were working on with Shinsou last time, and I want that to continue," Aizawa says, his dark eyes moving to look at Shinsou. Izuku watches as Shinsou grimaces slightly.

"I don't know if--" Shinsou starts, but Ema cuts him off.

"Yes, let's do it!" she says, pumping a fist in the air, her whiskers twitching. "I've been dying to see what else you can do." Shinsou glances over to her. Aizawa watches the interaction for a moment, and Izuku thinks he's waiting for something. After a moment, Shinsou sighs.

"Fine," he says. "I guess I could use some more practice." His voice is a low grumble, but he doesn't look that unhappy about it, really. Izuku wonders if his hesitance is because of the reputation his quirk has given him or if it's because of the headache he had last time, after practicing. Izuku doesn't get much time to think about it, though, because Aizawa is turning to Izuku.

"I want you to work on parkour and stealth," Aizawa says. "I reviewed some of the notes from the provisional license exam, and it seems you have talent in both of those areas. I want to see it firsthand." He glances over Izuku, and Izuku can feel a hint of a flush creeping up his face.

"O-Okay," Izuku says. Aizawa glances over to the second years.

"Maka, you'll be with us," he says. "Are you going to be fine with doing physical activity?" Izuku watches as Maka narrows her eyes at him, crimson shining behind long, dark lashes.

"I'll be better than fine," she says, her voice thick with annoyance. "Better question is whether or not Midoriya will be okay if I start sweating," she glances over to Izuku.

"I-I can't smell your quirk at all right now," Izuku says, meeting her gaze. "But I-I think I'll be okay. I'm kinda--kinda used to being afraid?" he offers up. Maka snorts, but she seems to relax slightly.

"It's not normal fear, but I'll believe you," she says, reaching up a hand to push a curl off of her forehead. "My quirk is actually pretty useful to train with, if you can handle it," she says. "Gives you practice working in a high stress situation."

"That it does," Aizawa says. Izuku looks back over to his teacher. "Maka, you'll be chasing Midoriya through the simulation city." He jerks a thumb back, at the other half of this gym. It's been in the form of a fake city for about a week now, courtesy of Cementoss. "Midoriya, your goal will be to make it fifteen minutes without getting caught. Maka, your goal is to catch and restrain him. No weapons," he adds, looking between the two of them. "I don't want to have to take either of you to the infirmary." Izuku nods, glancing over at Maka. He remembers that she had said she uses brass knuckles and a bo staff, but he doesn't think he's actually seen her using either.

"You got it, teach," Maka says, lazily giving a salute. Izuku hears Aizawa sigh.

"I'll be watching you two, mostly," he says, then casts a glance over to the side where Shinsou, Haruta, and Ema have gathered into a small circle and started talking. "I think they'll manage fine on their own. Ema won't stop emailing me about it, so I know she has ideas." Aizawa sighs, looking back over to Izuku and Maka before he turns, starting to walk towards the simulation city in the back of the gym. Izuku follows behind him, with Maka more or less even at his side, one of her hands on her hip and the other hanging at her side.

"I heard you got your license," Maka says, looking at him out of the sides of her eyes. "Congrats." Izuku blinks, looking for some sign of insincerity in her face, but there doesn't seem to be any.

"T-Thanks," he says, biting at his lower lip. Maka just grunts in reply, turning her gaze forward again. It doesn't take long for them to get to the city, and when they do, Aizawa turns back to look at them, his hands in the pockets of his sweatpants.

"Alright," Aizawa says. "I'll be following you two, but I'll try not to get in the way. Midoriya, I'll give you a thirty second headstart. Go," he says, tipping his head back at the mock city. Izuku doesn't waste any time, taking off along the street in front of him and turning right on the first intersection he sees.

If I want to win, I'll have to make it hard for her to find me in the first place, not just for her to catch me. Izuku ducks into the open window of the first building, then runs through it quickly, his sneakers quiet on the concrete floor. Izuku climbs out the window on the other side of the building, using the window ledge to lift himself up, climbing up the side of the building and onto the roof. Izuku grits his teeth as the rough surface of the concrete digs into the pads of his fingers. *I should have worn my costume instead*, he thinks as he hauls himself up.

He hears when Maka starts to move, in the quick footsteps that echo in the city made entirely of concrete and clear air. Izuku waits for a heartbeat, as she probably turns right, and he jumps from his building to the next one over, effectively putting himself behind her. He doesn't waste any time, running quickly along the rooftop and over to the next, where he jumps through an open window into what looks to be the second from the top story of the building. The nice thing about Cementoss's fake cities is that he can't make glass--so Izuku can jump easily through windows. The problem is that the buildings are simple, unfurnished. If Maka found the right building, she'd find the right room. Izuku needs to put some distance between them and then hide somewhere that either he wouldn't be found or where he could easily escape from.

Izuku takes a second to catch his breath. It'll likely take Maka a few moments to notice that he'd ended up behind her, and when she does, she'll assume he's further than he is. He walks carefully, quietly, to a corner of the room where a staircase blocks him from the view of any of the windows. It's not a perfect solution--Izuku will have to move again soon--but Izuku only has to keep this up

for fifteen minutes. If he can keep himself hidden for five in each spot, he can minimize the amount of time he has to be moving, saving his energy in case Maka ends up fighting him. Izuku's not totally sure he could beat her in a fight unarmed.

Izuku waits, listening as the sound of his own heartbeat grows slower, calmer. He doesn't hear much except for the air conditioning and the buzz of the lights in the ceiling. Izuku strains his ears, but he doesn't hear anything that could be Maka moving, and it sends an arrow of apprehension through his heart. He can't know where he is if he doesn't hear her, and he doesn't *want* her to find him, not when she--

I can feel her quirk, Izuku realizes. *That means she's close*, Izuku thinks. She must have been running a little, for enough of her sweat to be released for the faint smell of baking bread to drift through the air. There's no wind, because it's a gym, but Izuku takes a step to one side, and the smell grows stronger. He steps back the opposite way, and it seems weaker. Izuku takes a steadying breath and heads in the direction with less of her scent. He hops out of the window and onto the rooftop of a shorter building below.

Izuku is greeted almost immediately by a punch aimed at his face. Maka is crouched on the rooftop, behind something that Izuku thinks is supposed to be a fake air conditioning unit. She's shirtless, with a black sports bra the only thing covering her upper body, and Izuku puts together right away what had happened--Maka had set a trap.

"Hey, freckles," Maka says, a grin on her face, her red eyes shining. "You ready to play?" Izuku swallows, biting at his lower lip. He steps forward, feinting a kick that Maka easily dodges. Izuku starts to run as she's distracted, his feet slapping against the concrete. *I've got to put some distance between us*.

"Later!" Izuku calls back as he jumps from the roof. The building is only two story, so Izuku rolls with the landing and all he gets from it is a sore spot on his shoulder, the bone there stinging as he rolls to his feet and starts to run. Izuku hears Maka swear, and when he casts a glance over his shoulder, she's climbing down from the roof. Izuku thinks that that buys him at least a couple of seconds to hide, and he sees a long, short building up ahead, probably meant to be some kind of store. Izuku hops through a window and runs into the dark building.

The building is full of concrete shelves, plain rectangular blocks that give the fake store aisles but not much else. Izuku takes a breath and runs quickly through the store, getting himself towards the back of the building. He can see windows on this side, too, but they open up into a wide, empty area with a few concrete trees--a park. Izuku doesn't think he'll be able to outrun or out fight Maka without weapons in an open space, so he waits, back pressed against a concrete wall.

He hears when Maka climbs into the building, the sounds of her footsteps echoing in the space. Izuku takes a slow breath, forcing himself to not make any sound at all. It's not like there are footprints for Maka to follow, and the fake store is huge; she'll have a hard time finding him in here unless she checks every aisle. *And she won't do that unless she thinks I stayed in here*. It's a gamble, but it's one that Izuku is willing to take.

Maka's footsteps are fast, and Izuku can hear them move across the store. He doesn't sigh with relief when her footsteps lead up to a window and disappear, but he thinks about it. She *could* still be in the building, but Izuku doesn't think it's likely. Either way, he'll wait a moment before he slips out, back the way he came in, probably. He doesn't know how much time has passed, but it's a solid plan, he thinks.

Izuku counts his heartbeats to pass the time. He can feel his blood pulsing in his throat, but it's with exertion and not fear. He can still kind of smell the traces of Maka's quirk in the building, faint and

heady, but Izuku doesn't feel that burst of fear that he thinks he's supposed to. Instead, in the way his blood moves fast through his body and the way anticipation builds the longer he waits, Izuku is happy. He feels that exhilaration, that rush of excitement that he hasn't felt in ages, and it reminds him of when he'd first started going out as Ace, when he first started to save people. It sends a rush of happiness through him, and he feels a smile crack across his face.

Izuku slips out from the aisle that he's hiding in, creeping over to the window he'd come in through. A quick glance around doesn't reveal anything more than shadows on the uniform, grey concrete, and Izuku moves smoothly out of the building. He tilts his head back, thinking, and then he's stepping up onto the window. There's not much in the way of handholds, so it takes him a moment, but Izuku manages to wiggle his way up along the touch surface of the building onto the top. He lays on his belly for a second to let his breathing slow back down to something that isn't so loud, and then he stands up, moving to the center of the roof.

The store is only a single story building, but it's large enough that it gives Izuku a few options of where to go. He can see the tallest building in the simulation city not too far from here, and he knows that it'd be difficult for Maka to climb up there at the same speed that he does, especially given that she has to worry about falling and dying and he doesn't. Izuku starts for the building when he hears his teacher's voice.

"Midoriya, it's been fifteen minutes," Aizawa says, his voice loud and distant. Izuku blinks, turning in the direction he'd heard the voice from. He can't see anyone, but Izuku starts in that direction, jogging to the edge of the roof and jumping off. He lands smoothly and hurries along the street, coming up to a bend in the road. There, he sees Aizawa and a very sweaty Maka with what looks like a scrape from falling on concrete on her right elbow.

"I won?" Izuku asks, because he's still kind of caught up on the fact that it's been fifteen minutes already. Aizawa nods, and Maka reaches up and wipes sweat off of her brow with one arm.

"Yeah, you're pretty damn quick," she says. She doesn't seem out of breath, but she's definitely covered in a thin layer of sweat, and her skin is flushed slightly.

"T-Thanks," Izuku says, not entirely sure of how to respond. He's starting to be able to smell Maka's quirk, and it's making his heart jump into his throat, making his stomach clench uncomfortably. Izuku must show it, somehow, because Maka's lips start to press into a thin line and she huffs out a breath.

"I'm going to go shower," she says, starting to turn and walk away, but Aizawa reaches out and grabs her by the upper arm, stopping her. Maka pauses, looking back at Aizawa, but she doesn't seem all that surprised. There's a downward quirk to her brow, though like she's worried or maybe nervous.

"Stay for a moment. If it becomes a problem, I'll just erase your quirk," Aizawa says. Maka hesitates, then nods, taking a step back to stand beside Aizawa, facing Izuku. Aizawa releases her arm, and Izuku can't help but look at the spot on her arm that his teacher had been holding, looking to see if there's any redness or anything, but there's nothing on her pale skin. Izuku feels a twinge in his gut at that, and he hates that he even checked.

"What's up?" Maka asks, glancing to Aizawa as she crosses her arms over her chest. Izuku glances at Aizawa, who's looking at Izuku with a steady gaze.

"Midoriya, you have a rare talent for stealth and for parkour," Aizawa says. Izuku blinks, but Aizawa keeps talking. "I noticed it in earlier exercises, but this confirms it." Izuku swallows. *Does Aizawa know that I'm Ace? Has he put it together?*

“I-I’m not--I’m not that good,” Izuku says, looking down at the ground. Maka snorts.

“Hello? Are you stupid?” She’s rolling her eyes when Izuku looks up at her. “You managed to evade me for fifteen minutes in a tiny model city and I only even *saw* you once. You jumped from the roof of a two story building and onto concrete and not only were you fine, you also kept running.” She sighs, her eyes narrowing slightly. “I’ve been training under Aizawa for at least twice as long as you have. You’ve got a fucking talent. Own it.” Izuku stares at her, feeling his eyes widen slightly.

“R-Really?” Izuku asks, his voice quiet. Aizawa nods where he’s standing beside Maka.

“Really,” Aizawa says, meeting Izuku’s gaze. “You’re more adept than some pros who have had years of field experience.” Izuku swallows, but doesn’t break eye contact as Aizawa speaks. “I know you’ve spoken before about wanting to be a daylight hero, but have you thought at all about working underground? You would be good at it,” Aizawa says. Izuku stares at him, swallowing, and embarrassingly, he starts to feel tears come to his eyes. He sees Aizawa’s brows furrow slightly for a second before Izuku speaks.

“You--You really mean that?” Izuku asks, his voice thick with happy tears. Aizawa squints at him.

“I do,” Aizawa says. Izuku smiles, reaching up and wiping tears off of his cheeks.

“I-I’ve never really--never really been told I was t-talented,” Izuku admits, sniffing and beaming up at Aizawa. Beside him, Maka groans.

“Oh lord,” she says, staring at the ceiling. “He’s crying. ‘Zawa, can I please go?” she asks. Aizawa sighs next to her.

“Yes, Maka, you can go,” he says, his voice thick with annoyance that Izuku knows is at least partially put on. As Maka turns to go, she looks back at Izuku.

“Really though, you should go underground. Everyone on this side of things is *way* smarter,” she says, tapping the side of her forehead with one finger. She gives him a sly smile, and Izuku grins back at her as she turns and walks away.

Chapter End Notes

content warning: talk of self harm in the context of therapy

[discord!](#)

i hope you enjoyed!!! i always feel like i don't get very far in each chapter ugh how is ~5k words so much to write and yet so little content

caught

Chapter Summary

last time: izuku trains with maka and also gets therapy (round 2)

Chapter Notes

HI POGCHAMPS long and special chapter today..... hope u enjoy :D

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

The night is quiet and cool when Izuku finds the Takasugi apartment. The moon is out, hanging low over the trees on the horizon. Izuku can see a low haze rising out of the woods just outside the city. The apartment is in a small complex, a set of three, two-story buildings made of red-brown brick. They're not in the greatest shape, with ivy growing up the sides and around the gutters along the roof. There are a few cars parked in the parking lot, but not as many as Izuku would expect if every apartment in the complex were occupied. It makes a dread pool in Izuku's gut, but he doesn't let it stop him from walking quietly down the road, down a slight slope into the parking lot of the complex. Izuku can see the parking spot marked with the Takasugi's apartment number, can see the beat up old car there, a little grey thing that looks like it's on its last legs. Izuku swallows, ducking into the edges of the forest that surrounds the apartment complex.

It makes it easy to sneak around to look at the Takasugi's balcony, the fact that the apartment complex is *right* on the edge of the city, with a thick tangle of woods barely kept back by a chain-link fence wrapping around three of the four sides of the complex. It also makes Izuku uneasy--it would be easy, *too* easy, for a villain or two to lurk in these woods, unseen. Even Izuku, who has far more practice in cities and is wearing *red and blue*, knows that he's well concealed here. He creeps around to the back of the building and he watches, looking through the glass sliding door. The lights are on inside, which surprises Izuku--it's past one in the morning, at least. But he can see into the apartment, can see someone that he recognizes as Ayano's father from the pictures that had been included in the file. The man is clearly working on something, sitting on the floor in front of a low table with papers strewn out across it.

Izuku can't make out much else, but he can tell that the apartment isn't in great shape. It's clean, from what he can see, but the tile on the floor is cracked in a few places and the light keeps flickering. The apartment is *tiny*, too, and Izuku gets a sinking feeling in his gut just looking at it. He'll have to do some more digging, maybe call the apartment complex pretending to be interested in renting, but he doesn't think that it could be more than a one bedroom unit. Izuku thinks that the couch looks slept on, too, but he's not entirely sure because it's hard to tell if that's a pillow and a folded up blanket resting on one end or if it's just two blankets. Izuku doesn't like what he's seeing, either way.

He'd known to expect something like this, when he went to investigate the two kids. He got their information from a quirk counseling service for low income families, and obviously some of them would be in rough patches, but what makes Izuku's chest get tight, what makes his stomach burn,

is the fact that he doesn't know if one person is enough for the Gekkeiju to not take Ayano Takasugi. He doesn't know if her father will be enough. Izuku needs more information to complete the mission, needs to get information from Ayano's school and figure out if she has friends, if her teachers like her, but at least with the other kid, there'd been something that would keep him safe at home. With Ayano, Izuku doesn't know. He doesn't know if he's going to be the one who condemns this kid to the same fate as Mouse.

Izuku sneaks back to UA through the forest and then through the city, but he feels like he's swimming through an ocean of tar with how heavy his heart is in his chest.

--

This time, when Izuku enters the Gekkeiju's tower, he thinks he knows what to expect. The lobby is clean and open as always, but there's the soft sound of chatter coming from the television in the side of the room. Izuku glances over to see a head of red hair, but it's not short and choppy like Fury's. As he watches, Manami perks up and turns in her seat, craning her neck to see Izuku.

"Hi!" she says, waving at him. "Long time no see." She gives him a too-wide smile, and Izuku can just barely make out the hearts in her eyes from this distance. Izuku swallows and waves back.

"H-Hi," he says, and that seems to be the right thing to do, because she turns back to the television with a hum. Izuku relaxes after a moment passes and she doesn't seem to be about to kill him or anything. He's still not sure how to read Manami, not sure what to think of her. Out of the three that seem to be just below Sasaki in ranking, she's the one he's interacted with the least. *If she's anything like her brother, that's probably a good thing*, Izuku muses.

Izuku walks up to the front desk, where Yamamoto is watching the computer screen as always. She nods at his approach, acknowledging his presence, and Izuku waits patiently for a moment as she types something out with one hand, clicking the mouse a few times.

"Fury's out today," Yamamoto says, and Izuku blinks. "You'll be seeing Leadfoot, instead. Fifth floor, she says she's by the elevators waiting for you." Yamamoto doesn't seem to notice Izuku's apparent relief at this, doesn't seem to notice the way tension bleeds out of his shoulders.

"T-Thanks," Izuku says, and Yamamoto just gives him a nod. Izuku hurries over to the elevators, his head filled with a confusing mixture of relief at not having to see Fury and apprehension at being so close to the elevator anyway. That, and Izuku doesn't think he's been on the fifth floor before. He's starting to wonder if the whole building is identical offices save for the first and seventh floors. He presses the call button on the elevator with his first knuckle and tries to distract himself from the fact that he's about to have to go inside the thing.

The elevator doors open, and Izuku steps inside, pressing the button for the fifth floor. He tries to shut his eyes, hoping that that keeps the anxiety from rising in his chest, but it doesn't help; he can still feel the lurch and jerk as the elevator moves. Izuku settles for twisting his hands together around the strap of the duffel bag he's brought with him. It seems kind of dumb that he brought it in the first place, now, considering that he probably won't have to spend the night without Fury here to torture him. He doesn't think that Miura would do that to him.

The elevator chimes softly, and Izuku steps off of it the second the doors open. He can see Miura on the other side, leaning up against the wall across the room. This floor is definitely different from the ones below it, with the elevators opening into a small room with soft yellow walls and thick, plush carpet. Miura is wearing a pair of thick, heavy-looking jeans covered in oil stains and smears of paint along with a green t-shirt in a similar state. Her hair is pulled back in the low ponytail that she usually wears with her mask and ears, although she's wearing neither right now.

Her left arm is marred with a hand shaped bruise on the bicep, and Izuku can see a series of bruises, small and oval-shaped on her neck and collarbone. It takes Izuku a moment to put together what they are--hickies--and he feels himself flush slightly at the realization.

“Ace,” Miura says, sighing. Izuku swallows, watching as she pushes herself off the wall. “Kazuo’s out, at the moment, so I’ll be taking your report today. I’m assuming that’s not a problem?” Izuku nods as she meets his eyes. There are dark bags under her eyes, and Izuku wonders what happened.

“T-That’s fine,” Izuku says. It’s more than just fine, really, but Izuku isn’t going to tell her what she already knows. Miura gives him a small nod, turning to the door besides her. She turns the knob, opening the door into what looks like a library.

“We can talk in here,” Miura says, walking inside through the open door without waiting for Izuku. Izuku swallows, following her into the room, and he’s strangely relieved to see that there are a number of tables and chairs scattered among the bookshelves, not just two facing each other like there normally is when Izuku meets with Fury.

The room is fairly small, and most of the space in it is taken up by bookshelves laden heavily with books. There are three identical tables, one pushed up against a wall and two in the empty spaces in the room. Each of the tables has two chairs made of the same dark wood, but there are also cream colored armchairs at a few places that Izuku can see. He wonders if the library extends further than he can see, which isn’t far with all of the bookshelves crowding his vision. As Izuku takes a seat in a chair across the table from the one Miura is sitting down in, he glances at the books closest to him. They all appear to be technical books, medical encyclopedias and different manuals and things of that kind. Izuku wonders how long it took to collect this many books; there must be *hundreds*, and that’s just what he can see.

“So, how did your week go?” Miura asks, leaning back slightly in her chair and folding her hands together on her lap. Izuku blinks at her.

“I-I was able to investigate the homes of both of the targets,” Izuku says, swallowing around the lump in his throat. “I haven’t--haven’t been able to check their schools yet, though.” Miura stares at him for a moment, then nods.

“I meant how your week actually went,” she says, with a hint of amusement in her voice. “But that’s certainly a good start,” she says. Izuku nods, hesitantly, but after a moment, Miura sighs, speaking again.

“You need to be careful what you do with that phone,” she says, her gaze moving down and to the side. “I was able to cover for you this time, because the messages had already been deleted by the time Yamamoto saw them, but if it happens again, I’m not going to be able to bribe Yamamoto to keep her mouth shut.” As Miura speaks, Izuku feels a trickle of cold dread run down his spine.

“Y-You can see--can see if I’ve messaged someone?” Izuku asks, his voice quiet. Miura sighs and nods.

“Of course we can,” she says, pressing her lips into a thin line. “Like I said, you need to be more careful. I might not care if you’re doing something behind the scenes, but Kazuo will,” she says. She shifts her hands in her lap. “You’re trying to get Mouse and R--Angel out, aren’t you?” Izuku swallows, nodding.

“I-I am,” he confirms, voice quiet. Miura shuts her eyes for a long moment, then opens them.

“I’d like to do that, too,” she says, her gaze off to the side. “I’ve been responsible for a lot of

people dying in this tower, but I don't...I can't just let it happen, not anymore," Miura says, her voice quiet. She turns her gaze back to Izuku. "I've already accepted that I'm not going to be able to make it out of this alive, but that doesn't need to be the case for you." Her voice is low, serious. "Don't do anything reckless," she says.

"W-Why wouldn't you be able to get out?" Izuku asks. Miura watches him with a carefully blank expression.

"Midoriya, I've been in the Gekkeiju for over seven years," she says, her voice low and flat. "I'm not getting out of this unless I'm dead or in handcuffs, and I'd frankly rather it be the former." Izuku stares at her, his brows knitting together.

"W-Wait, how old are you?" he asks. "I know you said you and the other two lieutenants helped to found the Gekkeiju, but you can't have been here for seven years, that's..." Miura stares back at him.

"I'm turning twenty this December," she says, quietly. Izuku stares at her.

"You were twelve?" he asks, his voice tiny. Miura nods, her head moving jerkily.

"That's not important," she says, pressing her lips together. "What *is* important is that you don't get caught, not until you and the two we're trying to protect are safe. So you can't use the phone we gave you to contact anyone other than Gekkeiju members, understand?" Her voice is firm, but Izuku can see something haunted in her dark eyes. He nods, slowly, and she seems to relax the tiniest bit.

"Good," Miura says. "I need to tell you about another mission we have for you, but first I should get your report on the two targets you were sent to investigate," she says, folding her hands in her lap again. Izuku nods.

"Um, Shinsuke Uegaki looks like--like he'd be difficult to take," Izuku says. "He lives in a big house, with at least three adults there." Miura nods.

"No information on if he's ever left home alone?" she asks. Izuku shakes his head.

"I-I don't know, but it definitely looked like--like someone was awake when I was there, so he's probably w-watched most of the time," Izuku says. Miura purses her lips.

"That makes him a more difficult target," she says. "What about Takasugi?" Izuku swallows.

"Um, she seems to--to live with just her father, but I'm not s-sure about school and stuff," Izuku says. "They live i-in an apartment at the edge of town," he says, not wanting to offer more information than the bare minimum. Miura nods, a thoughtful look on her face.

"I can probably get Clean to investigate her school routine, since you have class at that time, right?" Miura asks, and Izuku nods, hesitantly. "If she's not close with people at school, it'll be pretty easy to either take her father out or just cover up any reports he makes," she says, crossing one leg over the other. Izuku feels his stomach turn solid and heavy, like a stone in his gut as he listens to Miura talk about kidnapping a child so casually, like it's something she does all the time. *It probably is*, Izuku realizes with a sickening feeling.

"W-What happens to her, if she does get captured?" Izuku asks. Miura sighs.

"Well, usually with kids her age we only keep them a month or two unless they're particularly useful and we can get them to cooperate," she says, glancing down at the table. "Most of our..."

assets are at another location, but even then, we don't keep many of the kids." Izuku frowns.

"What--what happens to them, after they're not useful?" Izuku feels his mouth going dry as he asks. Miura stares at him for a moment, a long, painful moment.

"We either sell them, or we dispose of them," Miura says, her voice flat and without emotion. She stares at Izuku, her dark eyes empty and blank. Izuku suddenly remembers the reputation Aizawa had spoken of for Leadfoot, that she'd killed every witness. Izuku swallows.

"Is that--is it your job?" he asks, his voice quiet. "Are you the one who does that?" Miura stares at him with that same blank expression for a moment, then sighs, her shoulders dropping as she stares at the table.

"Yes," she says, quietly. "I am." A moment passes where Izuku can feel the rushing blood in his ears, can feel his heart pounding in his chest before Miura speaks again. "I hope I never have to again," she says. Izuku nods, shakily.

"I-I hope so too," he says, and he can't tell if he's afraid of Miura or sorry for her. The Miura he knows isn't someone who would kill children, who would kill everyone who saw her, but he doesn't know her past. Something doesn't add up, and it's making Izuku confused, but he doesn't even know what to ask to figure out what's going on with her.

"Your next mission is fairly dangerous," Miura says, still staring down at the table. "Have you heard anything at all about the Shie Hassaikai?" she asks. Izuku frowns, shaking his head.

"No, I haven't," he replies, and Miura nods, not appearing surprised at all.

"They're an older organization, a yakuza group, but they're not as active as they were in the pre-quirk era," she says, shifting her hands in her lap and looking up at Izuku. "It's not all set in stone yet, but we might be trying to take them down. Their goals are directly in opposition to the boss's," she says. Izuku blinks.

"W-What are their goals?" Izuku asks.

"Ultimately, I think they're trying to get rid of quirks altogether," Miura says, and Izuku blinks. "Since our goal is... well, the short version is we're trying to acquire specific quirks. Since their goal can make ours more difficult, the boss wants us to interfere," Miura says, with a heavy sigh. "It's always messy, getting involved with other organizations like this. What you're supposed to do is try and learn more about the raid that UA is planning." She eyes him. "I'm guessing you haven't heard of that, either?"

"N-No," Izuku replies, his brow furrowing. "How do you guys know about that, if it's within UA?" he asks, biting his lower lip. Miura blinks.

"Oh, I thought you knew," she says. "Whatever, it's fairly obvious. We have a spy at UA," she says, like it's nothing. Izuku stares at her. "They can't participate in the raid, for certain reasons, but they said you likely would be able to if you tried to," she says, watching him. Izuku swallows.

"D-Does it have to be as Izuku? Or can it be as Ace?" Izuku asks. Miura stares at him for a second, then sighs.

"Ace might work better, actually," she says. "Your two identities aren't linked, right? It might help to keep things quiet, but you'd need to be careful that nobody sees under your mask." She moves her hands, picking at the edge of her shirt sleeve with one arm. "The League wants to work with the Shie Hassaikai, by the way. They're not exactly in our good graces right now, both because of that

and what happened at the summer camp,” she says, mild frustration in her voice.

“Because you got me instead of N--Monoma?” Izuku asks. Miura glances over to him, her face slightly surprised.

“Well, yeah. We thought you were quirkless, and his quirk would have let us use any subject’s quirk so long as he cooperated,” she says. “The boss thought we’d have a pretty good chance at convincing him, too,” she says. Izuku doesn’t think they would, but he doesn’t say as much. It’s probably best for Neito if they don’t know that Izuku is close with him.

“So the League was supposed to get Kacchan and you guys were supposed to get Monoma?” Izuku asks. Miura nods.

“Yeah, we also helped the League out financially,” she says, her lips twisting into a slight scowl. “I outfitted them with weapons, too. They were supposed to give us something else, but they didn’t keep their end of the deal, and their boss is in prison now, as I’m sure you know,” she says, and Izuku nods. He knows about All for One, knows about his imprisonment.

“So you--you just want me to try to be at the raid?” Izuku asks. “So that I can help it succeed?” Miura nods.

“Don’t reveal your quirk, obviously, but basically,” she says. “A few of our members will be infiltrating the raid itself and helping the heroes out, but since our goals aren’t public, we don’t exactly want it known that we’re participating,” she says. “It’d give the heroes too many clues as to what we want.” Her eyes narrow slightly. “So you’ll need to be careful if you’re leaking that to them.” Izuku swallows, nodding quickly. Something occurs to him, then, and he mulls it over for a moment before speaking.

“So... if I were to break Mouse and Avenging Angel out, that would be a good time to do it? During the raid?” He runs his teeth over his tongue, thinking. “The boss and you three would be busy watching the raid, and some of the members would be out for that, I’m assuming. And if I’m at the raid, then nobody can accuse me of doing it,” he says. Miura looks at him strangely, tipping her head and frowning slightly.

“If you’re at the raid,” she says, slowly. “You can’t also be here to break them out, Midoriya.” She says it like she thinks she might be misunderstanding.

“But it would be a good time to do that, if I could be in two places at once,” Izuku says. Miura stares at him.

“I guess,” she says. “But you can’t be in two places at once.” She’s studying Izuku. “Can you?”

“I can’t,” Izuku confirms, a smile creeping up on his face. “I might have a plan, though.” He meets her eyes. “You’d help me? Save Mouse and Angel, I mean.” Miura nods, slowly. She doesn’t return his smile, but it looks like she might be thinking about it.

“I would,” she says, quietly. “If it came down to it, I would give my life to save her.” Izuku grins.

“Me too,” he says.

--

Izuku plops down onto the bed in his dorm room, a breath escaping him as he sinks into the soft mattress. He’s had a lot of time to think, on the train ride home from the tower and at home, where his mom had been happy to see him talkative and upbeat. He’s had a lot of time to move past his

optimism, to realize how his plan probably won't work, how unlikely it is that he'll be able to make his plan work. Izuku's had plenty of time to think about how, even if he and Miura are willing to work hard, willing to die, it doesn't mean that they're going to succeed. It doesn't mean that they're going to get Mouse out, doesn't mean they're going to save Angel. It doesn't mean that either of them will be okay.

It's routine, now, when he pulls his razor out of his jean pocket and slips it out of the pill case it's shoved in. He slides up the sleeve of his hoodie, revealing the skin below, milky-pale from being hidden under sleeves for so long. His old marks, from before he moved to just his bicep, are just thin white lines at this point, just above his elbow on his bicep. He grits his teeth, then opens the bottom drawer on his nightstand and pulls out a square of gauze, still in the sterile packaging. He doesn't want to get blood on the sheets.

He draws the razor across his skin, watches the surface of it split and show an uneven whiteness beneath, like styrofoam hiding under his skin. He bites his lip and watches the cut fill with bright blood, then makes another, pushing himself to go deeper, to see more. He does five, total, before it hits him, before the stinging in his arm starts and he's washed over with that soft, raw euphoria that he gets from this. He feels clean, tired, empty. He takes a deep breath. He could go for another round.

"Hey, Midoriya--" He stiffens, back going straight as a board as he hears a familiar low voice on the other side of his door and he prays, prays that he locked his door.

The doorknob clicks, and the door opens. Izuku's eyes meet Shinsou's, his violet-grey eyes stretched wide with alarm. He steps inside the room, shutting the door behind him.

"Midoriya?" He says, voice shaky and soft and he takes a step toward him. Suddenly, Izuku feels cornered. Like he's in a tiny box, in an elevator with no way out. He's going to have to kill himself to get out of this, he realizes. He's going to have to go back. A wave of despair rises in his throat.

"Shinsou, it's not what--" He stops talking as a kind of dullness fills him, the familiar mental weight of Shinsou's quirk. *Oh*. He hadn't been expecting that.

"Give me the razor," Shinsou orders, marching forward quickly and snatching the weapon out of Izuku's hand when it offers it up, moving outside of Izuku's control. Shinsou's mouth is set in a thin line, his brows drawn low on his face. He's wearing pajamas, Izuku notes, a purple t-shirt and grey sweatpants. He sets the razor on the edge of the desk furthest from Izuku.

Shinsou stares at him, at his arm. Izuku can't look, can't turn his head, but he can feel the blood starting to run down his skin. Shinsou notices this too, and he grabs the gauze from where it's resting on Izuku's bed, tearing the package opening and pressing it to the wounds. *He's not putting enough pressure*, Izuku thinks. *It'll keep bleeding*.

"Tell me what you were doing," Shinsou says, and Izuku wants to laugh because *isn't it obvious?*

"Cutting myself," Izuku's mouth replies back obediently. He curses Shinsou's quirk. He should have known better to reply in a situation like this. As much as Shinsou doesn't want to use his quirk to hurt people, he won't hesitate to do it if he thinks he's *helping*. He kind of hates that Shinsou's figured his quirk out to the point where he can do this, can ask questions.

"What are--" Shinsou pauses. "Tell me what you're going to do next."

"Kill myself," Izuku replies, and he watches Shinsou's eyes widen and his brows jerk up. He stumbles a step back, then leans forward again, putting more pressure on the cuts this time.

“Fuck,” Shinsou mutters, and Izuku has to agree with the statement. This is not the situation he wanted to be in. He tries to push at the mental constraints, hoping the pressure on his cuts would be enough to break the brainwashing, but it doesn’t work. It would need to be more painful, probably.

Shinsou takes a breath, makes eye contact with Izuku. “Do you have a plan?” he asks. Izuku doesn’t answer; it’s not an order.

Shinsou sighs. “Tell me if you have a plan, and what it is.”

“I don’t have a specific plan,” Izuku replies, which is true. “I’d probably jump off the roof or slit my wrists, depending on what I thought I could get away with before someone caught me.” Crap. He hadn’t meant to say that out loud, but apparently his brain considered it an answer to Shinsou’s question.

Shinsou squeezes his eyes shut for a second, then opens them. “Tell me what you’ll do if I release the mind control right now.”

“Try to talk you into leaving me alone,” Izuku replies. He’s not going to make his classmate *watch* as he offs himself, not on purpose. That would be a level of cruel he isn’t sure he’s ready for.

Shinsou eyes him nervously, then sighs, his quirk dropping away from Izuku and leaving him blinking in his own body, the sensation of being able to move again jarring.

“Midoriya?” Shinsou says his name like it’s a plea.

Izuku considers not answering for a second, but abandons the idea. “Yeah?”

Shinsou doesn’t activate his quirk. “What *happened*?” His voice cracks, and Izuku feels his own eyes start to well up with tears.

“It’s--” He swallows. “It’s not what it seems like,” he says, and even though it’s the truth he can see the doubt flash in Shinsou’s eyes.

“Then what is it?” Shinsou asks, almost muttering, and he pulls his phone out of his pocket with his free hand, tapping at the screen. Izuku blinks, then lunges for it.

“Midoriya!” He hisses, pulling back. “What the hell?”

Izuku just clenches his teeth. He doesn’t want Shinsou calling anyone. He swipes for the phone again, and Shinsou lets go of him, jumping back and pressing the phone to his ear.

“Pick up, pick up, pick up...” Shinsou’s shaking, Izuku realizes. He draws his hand back, settling back on the bed. Shinsou shoots him a worried look, then sighs in relief.

“Sensei, come to Midoriya’s dorm--” He pauses. “Yes, it’s an emergency.” Izuku sees what might be the start of tears forming in the corners of Shinsou’s eyes, but he’s not sure. It could just be the light.

Shinsou draws in a breath. “Uh. I caught Midoriya cutting himself and he told me he was going to commit suicide.” He glances at Izuku’s arm, and Izuku looks down at it himself. It’s stopped bleeding, but it’s probably kind of freaky to look at for Shinsou. He picks up the gauze, pressing it back against the wound.

“He’s just sitting there,” Shinsou says, worrying at his lower lip. “No, he’s not trying to get away. He tried to stop me from calling you, though.”

He hears the beep of the call ending the exact moment before the door to his room slams open, and Aizawa marches in, slamming it behind him. His teacher is wearing a white t-shirt and black basketball shorts, his hair pulled back in a messy bun, but his face is twisted and he's at Izuku's side in an instant.

He grabs Izuku's arm, lifting the gauze off of it gently and staring at the cuts underneath. His expression is grim, mixed up shock and fear and concern and something else. Izuku swallows. He needs to get away, soon, before he *can't*. He doesn't want this to end up in the permanent timeline.

"Sorry," he whispers, and he bites down on his own tongue.

He hears Aizawa make a choking sound and grab Izuku's jaw, and Izuku tastes salty, iron-y blood, but he realizes with horror that he hadn't managed to bite all the way through his tongue. He coughs, a mouthful of spit mixed with blood coming out of his mouth and falling onto his lap. The room smells like metal.

"*Shit*," Aizawa says, putting one hand on Izuku's jaw and another on his face, forcing his mouth open. Izuku lets him, knowing full well that all he managed to do was make a nasty cut in his tongue. Fuck. *That always worked in the movies. Maybe if I'd been wearing the razor teeth*. Shinsou looks like he just saw a ghost.

"Midoriya," Aizawa growls. "Do *not* try that again." He sounds rough, but Izuku thinks he can hear the fear in his voice. He releases his death grip on Izuku's face, finally, and Izuku spits out another mouthful of blood.

"It probably wasn't going to work even if I got all the way through," he mutters, voice muffled and cottony from his injury. Aizawa stares at him incredulously.

"Shinsou," he says, not turning away from Izuku. "Go get Midnight." Shinsou nods, and Izuku feels a cold dread fill him.

"No, Aizawa-sensei," Izuku gasps. "You don't n-need to get--to get Midnight-sensei, I-I'm fine now." He watches Shinsou open his door and rush away, the light of the dorm room spilling into the hallway. He's surprised nobody else is awake, with the noise they're making.

"You just tried to bite your fucking tongue off," Aizawa hisses. "You need to be sedated until you're stable."

Izuku knows he'd be right, normally. But Izuku isn't a normal situation. He realizes, abruptly, that even if he's on the second floor and not the first, Aizawa doesn't have his capture weapon with him. Izuku could jump out the glass door to the balcony-- he could get away, and he could kill himself and get it *over with already*.

Izuku takes a deep breath and makes his voice hitch on purpose, trying to sound like he's about to cry. He sees Aizawa's face twist, and that's when he moves. He jerks himself back, turning in one smooth motion and launches himself at the glass as hard as he can, praying desperately that it's not shatterproof. He knows he doesn't have time to open it.

The glass shatters in a brilliant shower of shards as Aizawa shouts, and Izuku feels the slice and rip of the shards of glass at the same time he feels a strong hand wrap around his wrist. He tugs as hard as he can, ignoring the sharp shooting pain as he steps on broken glass with bare feet. He gets to the balcony and heaves himself over the edge, feeling Aizawa's grip loosening on him slightly. He hopes Aizawa didn't get hurt when he broke the window. He throws himself off the balcony.

He hits the ground on his side, and he can hear the tell-tale crack of bones breaking but ignores it. The concrete is icy cold under him, almost soothing as he heaves himself up onto sore legs, blood running down the inside of his sweatpants where glass is embedded in his skin. He starts running, his eyes watering at the glass digging deeper into the soles of his feet. The impact of each step sends lightning hot pain through the arm he landed on, and he notes that that's the bone that broke, probably. He hears footsteps behind him, probably Aizawa. He knew the hero would jump out after him, but he'd hoped he'd have more time to put some distance between them before this happened.

He swerves into the woods, headed through the familiar terrain and ignoring the branches whipping at his face and slapping his broken arm. He knows where his stash is, even in the darkness and with the pain almost blinding him, even though it's nothing compared to Hell. *How funny that with everything I've been through, this might be one of the more painful things*. The forest is navy-blue with the darkness of the night, and he can barely see the dark green of the trees, but he knows where to run.

He reaches the tree in barely enough time, reaching into the hollow trunk and yanking out his knife with Aizawa's panicked footsteps drawing closer. He unsheathes the knife and presses it to his throat, the cold metal sharp on his pulse point, and he turns to face Aizawa just as the man bursts through the trees. He's cut up, badly, with a chunk of glass stuck in his forearm and a cut across his chest that rips his shirt open. His eyes are wide with terror, and Izuku can see the protest on his lips.

Izuku grimaces, then draws the blade across his throat. It takes less than a second for him to bleed out, and the sensation is almost comforting.

--

When he opens his eyes, he's on the bed in his room, hand in his jean pocket wrapped around the pillbox he keeps his razor in. He yanks his hand out of the pocket, grips his knees and tries to breathe. His head hurts, and he's dizzy with adrenaline which is stupid because it's not like he's in any danger. He just can't get the expression on Aizawa's face out of his head, can't get the look of horror out of his mind. He shuts his eyes, but he just sees the fear and the guilt on Aizawa's face as he lunges for Izuku, remembers the sting of the knife as he dug it into his carotid. He's killed himself in some pretty nasty ways before, but never like *that*, never right in front of someone as they desperately tried to save him. Not in front of someone who *cares*, who thinks it's *permanent*. People have caught him dying, but they haven't *chased him down* and then *seen him commit*.

It's different than it had been with Nighteye, because he hasn't seen them as he did it. Izuku thinks that he'd seen them, right before he died, but he hadn't made the cut with them watching. It's different. He didn't have a choice, there. Here, he'd just been cutting himself because he *wanted to*. Because he wanted to do something to soothe himself. Because he was *upset*. And Aizawa, even if he didn't remember, had to suffer for it.

"Hey, Midoriya--" Shinsou's voice, just like last time, interrupts his thoughts, and Izuku jerks his head up, watches as the doorknob clicks and the door swings open. Shinsou takes a step into his dorm room, then blinks.

"Are you... crying?" Shinsou asks, brows drawing together, and Izuku curses mentally. He hadn't realized he'd started to tear up, hadn't noticed the tear tracks running down his face. Some horrible, desperate part of him whispers *kill yourself again as punishment for what you just did* and he sucks in a sharp breath of air, biting his lip.

Shinsou shuts the door behind him carefully, barely making a sound. He approaches Izuku slowly,

with hands raised so Izuku can see them. Izuku wants to say that he's okay, that nothing is wrong, but he remembers the look on Shinsou's face when he'd admitted he was going to *kill himself* if Shinsou let him, and he chokes on whatever words had started to make their way up his throat.

Shinsou tugs nervously at his collar. "Should I get Aizawa-sensei?" he asks, awkward and nervous because of course he doesn't know how to deal with this. Izuku, distantly, notes that his own breathing is uneven and ragged, harsh in the relative quiet of the dorms. Shinsou is staring at him, uncertainty and worry in his violet eyes.

Izuku shakes his head. "N-No, I'm--" he sucks in a breath, makes himself hold it for a second. "I-I'm okay, I-I swear." He looks up at Shinsou and gives him a watery smile, which Shinsou returns with a halfhearted upward tick of the lip.

"You don't look okay," Shinsou says back to him, then sits next to him on the bed, sighs as he plops down. "Do you have panic attacks a lot?"

Izuku wants to say that this isn't a panic attack, but before he can form the words he realizes that it definitely, definitely is. He can feel his breaths catching in his throat, the wave of regret and terror nestled in his chest. He nods in response to Shinsou's question, and embarrassingly he sobs, a watery noise that seems to echo in the room.

"Do you, um," Shinsou worries at his lip. "Do you take any... medicine for it? Or is there someone I should call?"

Izuku shakes his head again, squeezes his knees where his hands are still gripping them. Shinsou doesn't say anything else, just sits with Izuku as he catches his breath. Izuku thinks it's kind of pathetic, honestly. He'd done this to himself, hadn't he? He's the one who got caught cutting and then ran away and slit his own throat in front of his *teacher*. This was his fault, so really, he has no reason to be upset.

He chokes out another sob, and he raises a hand to try and cover his mouth. Shinsou puts a hand on his shoulder, gingerly patting him. Izuku just shuts his eyes, trying to make himself breathe a full breath. He can't, though, as the heavy fear starts to fill his throat and strangle him. He feels his fingers digging into his face.

"I really think I should call sensei," Shinsou says, quietly like he isn't talking to Izuku. Izuku goes to shake his head, but the thought of seeing Aizawa, well and whole and not cut by glass or on the verge of tears because Izuku just tried to bite his own tongue off, well.... It's a nice thought. He doesn't know why, but his chest aches at the thought of Aizawa comforting him, right now, even though he knows damn well he doesn't deserve it.

Izuku nods, just the slightest bit, and it seems to be enough for Shinsou, who takes his phone out of the same pocket it was in last time, taps at the screen. It's different than last time, though, because Izuku doesn't try to stop him and he's close enough to hear the conversation from both sides.

"What?" Aizawa says when the line connects, annoyed. Izuku wonders if he's working on something.

"Can you come to Midoriya's dorm?" Shinsou asks.

"Why?" Izuku hears rustling on the other end of the line. "Is this an emergency?"

"I... I'm not sure," Shinsou says, glancing at Izuku, who at least for the moment is able to breathe somewhat. "Midoriya's having a panic attack?" He says it like it's a question.

“I’ll be right there,” Aizawa replies, and the line disconnects with a click. Shinsou drops the phone into his lap and sighs. Izuku can’t help but watch the motion, but he’s starting to feel dizzy from hyperventilating. It’s strange, because he doesn’t know why he’s still breathing so crazy. He feels disconnected from himself, from his body and his emotions. He clenches and unclenches the hand that isn’t covering his mouth, feels a tingle in his fingers like they’re falling asleep. He wonders if he’ll end up knocking himself out. It’d be pretty pathetic, considering all of the worse things he’s been through before.

The door to his dorm opens quickly, then shuts just as fast as Aizawa steps into the room. He’s wearing the same thing as last time, of course, but Izuku sees the way his shirt isn’t cut and his arms aren’t torn up and the way his bun isn’t half fallen out and he chokes on a fresh sob, hot tears running out of his eyes and spilling onto the hand he’s smothering his mouth with. Aizawa’s mouth thins and he’s marching toward Izuku with almost as much urgency as last time. He crouches in front of Izuku and makes eye contact with him. His red-rimmed eyes are familiar and comforting.

“Midoriya,” he says. “Can you hear me?” he asks, and Midoriya nods, a watery sob rising in his throat as he does.

“I’m going to put my hand on your shoulder. Is that okay?” he asks and Izuku is nodding furiously before he has a chance to think about it. Aizawa places a warm hand on his shoulder, squeezing gently. Izuku tries to suck in a breath, but it gets caught somewhere on the way and he just wheezes. His chest feels too tight.

“Midoriya,” Aizawa says, and Izuku refocuses on his teacher. “Can you move your hand off of your mouth for me?”

Izuku is confused for a second before he feels the too-tight grip of his own hand on his face and he nods, unclenching his fingers and pulling them away, dropping his hand to his lap. His face tingles like it’s asleep where his hand was, and Izuku blinks dazedly. He’d forgotten his hand was there at all. He looks up at Aizawa, at the way his face is calm and concerned, the way he meets Izuku’s gaze easily.

“S-Sensei,” he chokes out, and Aizawa shushes him gently, squeezing his shoulder. Izuku can’t help it when he leans forward into Aizawa’s arms, wrapping himself around his teacher. He doesn’t know why now, of all times, he wants comfort like this, why he wants to be hugged. He should be *afraid* of touch, should be flinching and recoiling. Izuku thinks he should be afraid, but when Aizawa wraps his arms around Izuku’s back, draws Izuku into his chest and holds him close, it makes something warm explode in Izuku’s chest.

Izuku is vaguely aware of Aizawa murmuring something to him, something soft and soothing as he rubs a gentle hand up and down Izuku’s uninjured arm. Izuku thinks that Aizawa is walking Izuku through a breathing exercise, or trying to at least, but Izuku isn’t sure. He can’t process the words, not for a long moment, and by the time he comes back to himself, Izuku’s breathing has slowed, his heart has calmed down, and Aizawa is just holding him, whispering the same thing over and over again.

“You’re okay. You’re okay. You’re okay,” Aizawa says, quietly. Izuku swallows back the salty taste in his mouth, and he sucks in air through his nose, making a wet sound as snot sucks back into it.

“I-I’m okay,” Izuku says, and Aizawa pauses for a moment.

“You can hear me,” Aizawa says, and it’s not really a question. “Glad to have you back,” Aizawa says, quietly. Izuku thinks he hears relief in his voice.

“Y-Yeah, Izuku says. “Sorry.”

“Don’t apologize,” Aizawa says, quietly. Izuku pulls back, slightly, and he can see Shinsou sitting in the corner, his phone in his hands. Izuku thinks he was probably playing with it while Izuku was panicking. He meets Izuku’s eyes.

“Doing better?” Shinsou asks, and Izuku nods, shaky.

“Y-Yeah,” Izuku says. “A-A little.” It certainly helps that Aizawa still has a warm grip on his shoulders, that both Aizawa and Shinsou have concerned looks on their faces but not deep fear. There’s even a little bit of relief there, Izuku thinks.

“You need to sleep,” Aizawa says, his brow creased slightly. “Tomorrow, you’re seeing Hound Dog for an emergency session,” Izuku opens his mouth to protest, but Aizawa silences him with a look. “No, you *will* .” Aizawa’s gaze softens, slightly. “I’m worried about you, Midoriya.” Izuku swallows.

“O-Okay,” he says, softly. “Can you--can you two stay? Until I fall asleep?” Izuku asks. Aizawa starts to nod, slowly, but it’s Shinsou who responds.

“I can do you one better,” Shinsou says, and when Izuku glances over to him, there’s a smile on his face that covers up some of the worry, but not all of it. “Do you want me to use my quirk to help you sleep? I’ve been able to make it so people don’t dream, too, if that’s a problem for you,” Shinsou says. Izuku blinks.

“S-Sure, but I don’t mind dream...ing...” Izuku trails off as his mind goes carefully, softly blank. It feels more gentle than the last time Shinsou used his quirk on him, but Izuku isn’t sure if that’s because it’s actually different or because he remembers it wrong.

“Sleep,” Shinsou says, and the world falls away softly, gently.

Chapter End Notes

content warning: self harm (graphic), panic attacks, talk of child abuse/death

[discord!](#)

HEY GUYS that last bit with shinsou and aizawa? that was the scene that started blnt. i wrote it and i was gonna just post it as a one shot and explain the background but.... i needed to write more and then it turned into This... i hope you enjoyed!!! I've been DYING for that bit to show up aaaa

what he heard

Chapter Summary

last time: izuku gets a mission from miura, has a mcfreakout and kills himself in front of aizawa then has a panic attack

Chapter Notes

HI GAMERS sorry i didn't update yesterday!!! imma be real there was no reason i just needed a day off lol but im back now with a hot hot chapter. i included a little gift in honor of chap 69 :)

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Izuku wakes up slowly. The world starts to come into focus in pieces, first with the softness of his sheets under his skin, shifting as he rolls onto his side. He swallows, still half asleep, then opens his eyes to his dorm room, dimly lit with light leaking in under his curtains. Izuku blinks sleep from his eyes, his vision focusing, and he sees Aizawa staring back at him. Aizawa is sitting on the ground, wrapped up in his yellow sleeping bag, but his eyes are open and his face seems to soften slightly as Izuku sits up.

“Sensei?” Izuku asks, his voice hoarse from sleeping. “Have you--have you been here all night?” Izuku pushes the sheets off of his legs, swinging them over the side of his bed as he glances around quickly. He remembers Shinsou had used his quirk on him, but Shinsou isn’t in here, so at the very least he probably got some sleep.

“Yeah,” Aizawa says, reaching up a hand to cover a yawn. “I slept, though, so don’t look so guilty.” He rubs a hand over his face, then looks at Izuku, blinking a couple of times. “How are you feeling?”

“Better,” Izuku says, sniffing slightly. “I’m sorry about--about last night,” he says. Aizawa’s eyes narrow slightly at him.

“Don’t apologize for that,” Aizawa says, but it’s more tired sounding than an actual reprimand. “I’d rather have been there to help than for you to go through that alone.” Izuku nods, slowly, breaking eye contact with his teacher.

“R-Right,” he says, quietly. Silence fills the room for a moment, and Izuku watches the light from under his curtains moving slightly, like fluffy clouds are drifting over the sun outside, or like a tree’s leaves are blocking the sun. The light is still dove-grey and pale, so Izuku doesn’t think it can be that late in the day, and when he glances over to his clock and sees 7:23 *a.m.* in red letters, it confirms it.

“Midoriya,” Aizawa says, and there’s something hesitant about his voice. “Are you... do you still have contact with the Gekkeiju?” Aizawa asks. Izuku feels something crawl up the back of his spine, cold fingers of anxiety working their way through him. *He’s suspicious of me being Ace.*

Izuku schools his face into a confused frown, twisting his lips and furrowing his brow.

“I don’t think so?” Izuku says, and it comes out with just the amount of confusion and surprise. “I-I’m pretty sure that I didn’t encounter all of them while they had me captured, so I guess I could be interacting with one of them without noticing,” he says. He’s grateful that the full night’s sleep is making him calm and rested, making it easy to look *normal*, to look like this isn’t making his heart pound in his chest. Aizawa stares at him for a long moment.

“Have you heard of a vigilante who goes by the name of Ace?” Aizawa asks. Izuku blinks, turning his head to the side. *Maybe I should have been an actor*, Izuku thinks to himself.

“I think so, yeah,” Izuku says, squinting like he’s thinking. “He was--he was on the news, right? He saved some kid, I-I think,” Izuku says. He pauses, biting his bottom lip. “His quirk was supposed to be some kind of future sight, if--if I’m remembering right,” he adds. He tries to sound like he would if he’d been asked about any other vigilante, about any other pro that isn’t a big name on the news. Aizawa nods, after a moment’s pause.

“Yeah,” Aizawa says, then sighs, unzipping his sleeping bag. The sound of the zipper cuts through the air, a clean, buzzing sound. “I should get ready for class,” Aizawa says, stepping out of his sleeping bag and standing up. “You’re excused from as many classes as you want to miss today, but you need to have someone with you in the dorms,” Aizawa says as he picks up the sleeping bag and drapes it over his arms. “I’ll walk you to your appointment with Hound Dog, once you’re ready. He wants to see you as soon as possible.” Izuku blinks, swallowing.

“I-I don’t want to miss class,” Izuku says. Aizawa raises an eyebrow at him.

“You can come back when you’re done with Hound Dog, but we both know that you don’t actually *need* to be in history of heroics,” Aizawa says. Izuku feels his face grow slightly warm.

“I-It’s not that I--that I think I already know it, it’s just--” Izuku starts, but Aizawa holds up a hand to stop him.

“I’ve heard about it from Cementoss already, Midoriya,” Aizawa says. “You haven’t missed a single question, and your essays are exceptional. You’ll survive missing one day of class.” Izuku swallows, nodding even though he’d really like to be in class, just in case they go over something interesting. Izuku can’t help it--he just finds heroics in general to be super cool!

“I-I guess that’s fine,” Izuku says. “Um, can I--can I get dressed? I’m still wearing my clothes from last night...” he trails off as Aizawa nods.

“Of course,” he says. “I’ll be waiting outside.” Aizawa turns, walking towards the door, but he pauses as he opens it, looking back over to glance at Izuku over his shoulder, his eyes slightly narrowed.

“Shinsou was quite worried about you,” Aizawa says. “If you decide to go back to class today, you might want to say something to him.” He steps out of the door, shutting it behind him. Izuku stares at the door before taking a deep breath and getting himself ready for the day to come.

--

When Izuku shows up at Nighteye’s agency late one night, wearing his Ace costume, it doesn’t occur to him that Nighteye might not even *be* here at midnight until he pushes on the door and it doesn’t open. It’s a little earlier than he usually sneaks out, mostly because between emergency therapy and all of his teachers treating him like he’d just had a major breakdown and not a fairly

ordinary panic attack, he'd been itching to get away from UA.

Izuku pauses for a moment, trying to look through the glass, but the mirror-tinting on its surface makes it impossible for Izuku to see anything other than an echo of his own face, his goggles reflective and red-orange, the bandages covering his mouth and nose laid evenly on his face. Izuku looks older, somehow, with the black hair and the bandages covering his chubby cheeks and freckles. At the same time, the poofy sleeves and the cropped cut of the jacket almost highlight his age, make his hands look smaller where they come out from the ends of his sleeves.

Izuku waits a moment, then raises his hand and knocks against the door, his knuckles rapping against the cold glass. He knows that it's not likely, that the chances of Nighteye being here are slim, but some part of him still isn't surprised when he hears something click on the other side of the door. Izuku takes a step back, watching as the door opens inward to show Nighteye, wearing the same grey suit he'd been in last time Izuku saw him. He looks tired, bags under his eyes like smears of charcoal.

Nighteye stares back at him for a moment, his golden eyes narrowed behind his glasses, and then he softens, slightly, stepping back and opening the glass door further so that Izuku can come inside. He doesn't look like Fury right now, not at all, and Izuku isn't sure if it's the black hair or the clear, square glasses instead of tinted ones, if it's the way Nighteye's suit is too big on him and everything Fury wears is perfectly tailored, but Izuku's grateful for it as he slips into the building. It doesn't stop him from scanning the room, from moving slowly and carefully, but it's nice to not be panicking.

"Ace, what are you doing here?" Nighteye asks, and his voice is rough, too. "You have my contact information. You could have simply called or texted me." He turns from the door, walking further into the building until he's settling down in the chair behind his desk, leaning forward to rest his elbows on the surface of it. Izuku wonders if he's met someone who sleeps as little as he does.

"I thought it would be more secure this way," Izuku says as he slowly, carefully walks closer to Nighteye. The building seems to be mostly empty, with all of the lights except for a set that lights the area by Nighteye's desk turned off, with the chairs all pushed in and empty. Nighteye sighs from his seat.

"Yes, it is," he confirms. "What is it?" he asks, reaching up to push his glasses up his nose. For some reason, that movement, a hand reaching for glasses covering golden eyes, makes Izuku flinch slightly, more of a jerk in surprise than anything, but if Nighteye notices, he doesn't show it.

"The Gekkeiju gave me--they gave me another mission," Izuku says, wrapping his gloved fingers around the hem of his sweater, squeezing the fabric there. Nighteye tips his head, slightly.

"And what is it?" Nighteye prompts. Izuku chews on his lower lip for a moment.

"Have you... have you heard of the Shie Hassaikai?" Izuku asks, and he sees Nighteye go stiff, tense. He can see the lines of tension creeping up the man's shoulders, can see the wariness flash in his gold eyes.

"A better question is why you know about that," Nighteye says. Izuku swallows.

"The-the Gekkeiju wants me to infiltrate the raid, to--to help UA take the Shie Hassaikai down," Izuku says, and he watches as Nighteye's eyes widen slightly, his brows furrowing.

"They want you to assist UA?" Nighteye asks. Izuku nods, quickly. It seems that his hunch about Nighteye being involved was at least not *totally* wrong. Either way, it's not like Izuku could have

gone to Aizawa as Ace about this--Ace has no reason to know that Eraserhead is a teacher at UA. It would have been like painting a red flag on his back that says *hey, I'm your student!* and Aizawa's already suspicious enough of Izuku.

"Y-Yeah," Izuku says. "The Shie Hassaikai--their goals are apparently t-the exact opposite to the Gekkeiju's," Izuku says, worrying at his lip under the mask. "T-They want to get rid of quirks, and the--the Gekkeiju are collecting certain quirks. I-I don't know exactly *what* kind they're looking for, but if the Shie Hassaikai got rid of quirks that--that would be bad for the Gekkeiju," Izuku explains. Nighteye stares back at him for a moment, his lips pressed into a thin line, and then he nods as he breathes out through his nose, slowly.

"Why are you asking me, specifically, about this?" Nighteye asks. It's a carefully worded question, and Izuku knows that it's a dangerous one, too. It helps that Izuku's on Nighteye's side for real, that for once the truth is all he has to say.

"I-I knew you worked with UA because of Lemillion," Izuku says. "I saw him on TV, at the sports festival, remember?" Izuku swallows. "I-I didn't know for *sure* that you would be involved, but I-I think you're my only contact who--who might have been involved," Izuku says, watching nervously as Nighteye's eyes narrow slightly.

"And how did the Gekkeiju know that UA was planning a raid in the first place?" Nighteye asks. Izuku stares back at him. He gets, now, why Miura had seem so caught off guard by the question.

"They have a spy," Izuku says, and Nighteye raises an eyebrow. "A-A spy within UA," Izuku clarifies, and after a moment's pause, Nighteye nods shortly.

"We've been aware of the presence of a spy within UA for quite some time," Nighteye says, a sigh in his voice. "It had been up for debate whether the spy was linked to the League of Villains or the Gekkeiju, though," he says, pushing his glasses up higher on his face. Izuku nods, the movement jerky.

"S-So can I help with the raid?" Izuku asks. Nighteye sighs, shifting slightly in his seat as he watches Izuku.

"I suspect that that would be a bad decision," Nighteye says. "As much as you seem determined to assist us in any way possible, giving you access to sensitive information could pose a threat to the mission as a whole." He sighs, pushing his glasses back up his nose where they've started to fall. "Beyond that, I hesitate to send someone your age with no formal training into the scene of a dangerous and potentially fatal mission." Izuku swallows, something that might be fear and might just be frustration rising in his throat.

"W-With all due respect, it's going to be a lot worse for me if I *can't* complete the mission," Izuku says, and he can't help the edge in his voice. Nighteye blinks at him for a moment before his eyes narrow.

"What would happen to you, if you failed to complete a mission?" Nighteye asks, carefully. Izuku hates being treated like this, like he's fragile, because if he can survive being burned and beaten and having every nerve in his body set on fire, he can survive a *question*. He can survive a raid; he can survive anything the Shie Hassaikai could throw at him.

"I'd be tortured," Izuku says, because why not? It's not like he has anything to gain by hiding that, not right this second. If Nighteye lets him go on this mission, it'll make it worth it. Nighteye stares at him for a moment before sighing, breathing out slowly as he reaches up to massage the bridge of his nose.

“Right,” Nighteye says, something strained in his voice. “Well, my point about sensitive information still stands. You’ll be allowed to participate in the raid itself, but not any of the more delicate portions of the operation. That should be sufficient for your mission, right?” Nighteye glances up, meeting Izuku’s gaze. Izuku nods quickly.

“I-It should be,” Izuku answers.

“Good,” Nighteye says. “I’m sure you’re already aware that your situation practically warrants a rescue mission of its own, yes?” Nighteye asks, his yellow eyes shining in the dim light. Izuku swallows.

“I-I think that’d be--that would be a bad idea, sir,” Izuku says, and Nighteye huffs out a breath, angling his head down to stare at his desk.

“I figured as much,” Nighteye says, before glancing up at Izuku again, looking at him over his glasses. “But don’t think that people aren’t working to get you out of your situation. I don’t believe for a second that this was all your own idea. You’re clearly being manipulated by the Gekkeiju.” His eyes seem to burn a hole in Izuku, and Izuku steps back, swallowing.

“You’ll--you’ll text me the details?” Izuku squeaks out. Nighteye stares at him for another moment before nodding.

“I will,” he says. “I’ll be seeing you again soon, Ace.” Izuku’s already started towards the door, and he just nods in response to Nighteye’s words. He has the sudden, sinking feeling of realizing that someone knows more than they should.

--

When Izuku hears the knock on his door, hesitant and soft, he’s honestly surprised it’s taken this long.

“Midoriya?” Shinsou calls, voice quiet. Izuku sets down the book he’s been reading, an assignment from English, and he uncrosses his legs from where he’d been sitting on his bed.

“Coming!” he says, hopping off the bed and walking over to the door, opening it. It’s not locked, not right now, but Izuku’s been more careful about keeping it locked when he hurts himself ever since that incident a few days ago. He doesn’t really want to scar his classmates more than he’s already scarred them, for one thing, and he’s also not super fond of the idea of having another close call like with Aizawa. Izuku opens the door to see Shinsou in his casual clothes, a long sleeved shirt and sweats that are a little big on him. Izuku gives Shinsou a smile, but the other boy grimaces at him.

“Hey,” Izuku says, opening the door wider. “Y-You can come in,” he says, and when he steps into his own room, Shinsou follows him.

“Feeling better?” Shinsou asks, which Izuku knows he already knows the answer to, seeing as Shinsou’s asked him that every day in class and at training since the incident. Izuku nods anyway.

“Yup! I’ve just been working on--on English,” Izuku says, gesturing to the book that’s laying open and face down on his bed. Shinsou scowls.

“You’re going to damage it like that,” Shinsou grumbles, picking the book up and staring down at it. “Where’s your bookmark?” Izuku blinks.

“Oh, I-I just dogear the pages,” Izuku says, and Shinsou glances up at him, his eyes narrowed.

“You *what*,” Shinsou says, lips pressed into a line. “That should be a crime, Midoriya,” he says, taking a few steps over to Izuku’s desk and picking up Izuku’s sticky notes. He tears the top one off, sticking it to the book, and then he shuts the book and sets it down on the desk, next to the block of sticky notes. Izuku watches him as he does.

“I’m sorry if I scared you the other night,” Izuku says, and Shinsou turns his head up, pale violet eyes meeting Izuku’s own. Izuku thinks he looks more tired than he has in a while, and Izuku hates that that’s because of him.

“You didn’t scare me,” Shinsou says, after a moment. “I knew what was happening,” he glances down, at the floor, then back up at Izuku’s face. “You worried me. Not--not scared.” Izuku blinks, slowly.

“Oh,” Izuku says, and he worries at his bottom lip, weighing his words carefully. “I’m sorry I worried you, then. That--that doesn’t happen that often.” Shinsou’s eyes narrow, slightly.

“Sure,” he says, the disbelief clear in his voice. “You’re not doing a work study, right?” Izuku’s caught off guard by the sudden change in topic, especially given that Shinsou’s face hasn’t shifted in the slightest.

“No, I’m--I’m not,” Izuku confirms. Shinsou nods, his gaze moving back to the surface of Izuku’s desk, like he’s scanning it for something. It makes Izuku nervous, even though he’s sure there’s nothing there that Shinsou would find unusual, anyway.

“But you could have,” Shinsou says. “Why didn’t you?” Izuku thinks he gets it, now. Shinsou hadn’t been allowed to do a work study, because he’s behind in classes; Izuku can remember Aizawa mentioning it at training. Izuku clasps his hands together in front of him, twisting his finger together.

“W-Well, um, I have a lot--a lot on my plate right now,” Izuku says. “I don’t--I don’t want my grades to suffer.” Shinsou glances up at him, a violet eyebrow raising.

“So it has nothing to do with the fact that you sneak out every night?” Shinsou asks, casually. Izuku tenses up, every hair standing on end, and he knows as soon as he does that that alone has given him away. Izuku takes in a shaky breath.

“Y-You heard me?” Izuku asks. Shinsou nods, and his face shifts slightly.

“Yeah,” he says. “I stay up pretty late most nights, you know.” Izuku swallows, twisting his hands together more tightly, with more pressure.

“Are you--are you going to tell Aizawa-sensei?” Izuku asks, his heart thudding high in his throat. He has to know, even if he’s giving Shinsou the idea to tell in the first place by bringing it up. Shinsou glances over to him, one eyebrow raising slightly.

“Should I?” Shinsou asks. “I don’t even know what you’re doing when you’re out. You don’t come back injured, not like when you’ve gone home on weekends, and you’re not loud.” Izuku stares at him.

“I-I’m not doing anything dangerous,” Izuku says. “I’m training.” Shinsou’s face doesn’t shift from his blank stare. It reminds Izuku of Aizawa, in more than one way.

“Training that you can’t do during the day?” Shinsou asks. Izuku nods.

“Um, you know how I’m k-kinda good at stealth and stuff?” Izuku shifts as Shinsou nods. “I’ve

been--I've been sneaking out at night to practice. That's why I'm so good." Izuku bites his lower lip, his teeth pressing sharp pinpricks of pain into the skin. Shinsou sighs.

"I figured it was something like that," he says, shrugging. "I just wanted to know, mostly." He reaches over on the desk, picking up Izuku's reading for English. "I haven't started this yet." Izuku blinks.

"R-Really?" he asks, his lips twitching into a frown. "It's--it's kind of long, you know. You should probably get started." Shinsou nods, opening the book to the first page.

Izuku and Shinsou end up spending the better part of the evening studying, and Izuku knows that part of it is Shinsou watching him, trying to figure out more of Izuku's secrets, but Izuku doesn't really mind. There's something nice about just talking about school stuff, for once, and he really did need to study before the upcoming quiz.

--

Izuku finds the warehouse when he's on a normal patrol. It's strange, really, that Izuku had the luck to stumble across something like this, and Izuku wonders, not for the first time, if he has a secret second quirk, one that lets him find villain hideouts. *Probably not*, he muses, *or I would have found the Gekkeiju base long before they kidnapped me*.

The warehouse is large, tall grey concrete that looks like nobody's been inside for months. Izuku's seen it on his patrol before, hundreds of times, and he's even run across the rooftop like this at least a dozen times. Izuku's moving across the top of the warehouse, near a vent on the ceiling, with a drizzle of rain falling onto the rooftop surrounding him when he hears it.

"This is fucking stupid," someone says, and it's a familiar, harsh male voice that it takes Izuku a moment too long to place. *Dabi*, his mind supplies, and the realization freezes his feet to the concrete. Izuku stands there, still mid-step like one more footstep will give him away if him sprinting across the roof a moment before hadn't. Izuku listens, carefully, as Kurogiri's voice, calm and even rises from within the building.

"As much as I don't approve of their methods, they're providing us with resources that we lost when the Gekkeiju stopped supporting us," Kurogiri says. Izuku can hear someone snarl in frustration, a raw, frustrated noise that echoes through the vents.

"Toga and Twice will be the ones to deal with them," Shigaraki's voice says, raspy and annoyed. "We've been over this already. Twice made a mistake and he's got to make up for it." Izuku swallows. That, at least, he understands. *When you make a mistake working with villains, you have to pay*.

"Yeah, I don't really get why we're arguing about this *again*," Spinner (Izuku thinks, anyway) says. "I really just want to eat dinner in peace."

"If you can even call this dinner," Dabi snorts. Izuku feels, oddly, like he's intruding on something personal.

"This is the best we can do with what we have! *It's horrible!*" someone, maybe Twice, says quickly, his words rushed like he's trying to say both things at once. Izuku bites his lip and settles down, crouching down to listen.

"The only thing that's going to happen if we work with these fuckers is that they'll kill Toga, Twice, or Kurogiri," Dabi says. "And then we'll be down another member." Izuku hears a beat of

silence.

“Yeah,” Toga says, her voice thick. “But Shigaraki thinks that it’s worth it.”

“Was it worth Compress’s arm? Magne’s life?” Spinner asks, his voice a low murmur. Izuku freezes. *They lost a member?* He vaguely remembers Magne from the raid on the summer camp, but not really.

“Shut up,” Shigaraki says. “Shut up and stop complaining.” Izuku swallows. “We’re playing games. Not arguing. We’ve done enough of that.”

“Fine, but I’m going to whoop your crusty ass,” Spinner says, his voice gruff.

Izuku listens for a while longer, but all he hears is the sounds of a video game and occasional murmurs that Izuku can’t make out the exact words from. He sits on that rooftop for far too long, thinking about the raid that’s coming and what Izuku is going to have to do.

--

School feels awkward. There’s something going on with Izuku’s friends, and it’s making him feel anxious every time he’s at lunch, with Iida on one side and Uraraka on the other. Iida is fine--he’s as talkative as always, making comments on what Izuku says and laughing at the jokes that Izuku makes. Uraraka, though, is quiet. She’s been picking at her food for the last few days, and today her, Tsuyu, and Kirishima were absent from morning classes. It wasn’t unusual on its own; the three of them had missed class for their work studies plenty of times before. The thing is, now it’s halfway through lunch, and all three of them are walking into the cafeteria together, shoulders almost touching as they walk, talking to each other quietly with drawn brows and frowns on their lips.

“Iida, look,” Izuku says, quietly. “Uraraka, Tsuyu, and Kirishima are back.” He nods toward them, and Iida turns from where he’d been shoveling his rice into his mouth. His mouth is still full when he turns, his brows furrowing slightly as he swallows.

“They seem upset,” Iida says, frowning and reaching up to dab at his mouth with a napkin. “I’m worried about what the work studies are doing to them.” Izuku nods, biting at his lower lip.

“I-I’m going to go ask if they’re okay,” Izuku says, standing up and pushing his tray of food forward on the table. “They probably can’t talk about it, if it’s--if it’s from their work studies, but...” Izuku trails off, but Iida nods.

“You want to do what you can to help,” he says. “I’ll text Todoroki, too. He’ll want to know, even if he won’t see it until after his remedial lesson,” Iida murmurs, picking his phone up from where it’s sitting next to his tray on the table. Izuku nods, absently, walking across the cafeteria to the entrance area, where his three friends are standing slightly off to the side, by the large window that faces the stretch of lawn between the building and the UA barrier. It takes them a moment to even notice Izuku’s presence, and it’s Tsuyu who seems to see him first, her head lifting slightly from where it had been angled at the floor. She doesn’t smile.

“Hey, guys,” Izuku says, giving them a slight smile. Kirishima and Uraraka look up, too, and Uraraka gives him a weak smile. Kirishima’s is the only one that’s semi-convincing. “Are you three okay?” he asks, pressing his lips together.

“Um, we’re fine!” Uraraka says, waving her hands. “It’s just, um, we’re trying to get caught up on school stuff, and it’s--it’s stressful,” she says, raising a hand to rub the back of her head. She

doesn't meet Izuku's eyes, which for her is a telltale sign that she isn't telling the truth. Izuku what it feels like, to want to be able to tell your friends the truth but not having that option, not being able to risk it all for something that is bigger than just one person.

"It's okay if--I know you can't tell me," Izuku says, moving his eyes over the three of them. "But don't forget that you've got people--people looking out for you!" Izuku says, giving them a smile. "Even if you can't say anything, just--just let me know if there's anything I can do," he says. The three of them stare at him, Uraraka's eyes starting to fill with big, shiny tears. Tsuyu just looks shocked, her mouth open slightly, and Kirishima is staring at him with big eyes.

"C-Can I have a hug?" Uraraka asks, reaching up to wipe at her eyes. Izuku nods, quickly, and Uraraka is wrapping her arms around him before he has a chance to hug her. She latches onto him, squeezing his middle, and she breathes shakily into his shoulder. Izuku brings his hands up to her back, rubbing the same slow circles that Aizawa had rubbed into his.

"I'm scared I'm gonna mess up," Uraraka says, quietly. Izuku nods, squeezing her tight to him.

"I know," he says. "B-But if it means anything, I don't think you're going to mess up," he says, swallowing and looking up, at Tsuyu and Kirishima. Kirishima pauses for a second, looking hesitant, and then he takes a step forward, wrapping his arms around Izuku and Uraraka. Izuku flinches, but just a tiny bit, enough that he can tell himself that they wouldn't notice. He holds them for a moment, until Kirishima pulls back. When he moves, Uraraka does too, wiping at her face with the backs of her hands.

"Sorry, Deku," she says, her face red. "I-I know you have your own stuff to worry about, and I can't even say what--" Izuku cuts her off.

"Don't apologize," he says, firmly. He gets, now, why people are always telling him not to apologize. "I want to help--to help you," Izuku says, glancing between the three of them. Tsuyu nods, and Kirishima gives him a shaky smile.

"T-Thanks," Uraraka says, wiping the last of her tears from her cheeks and putting a determined look on her face. "I'm gonna go get lunch now, that should cheer me up!" She puffs out her chest, giving Izuku a thumbs up. Even though her eyes are still red and her voice is wobbly, it makes Izuku smile softly.

"Okay," he says, nodding. "That's a good idea." He looks at Tsuyu and Kirishima, and it's Tsuyu who nods.

"We'll go too, ribbit. Thanks, Midoriya," Tsuyu says, a slight upturn to her lips. Kirishima nods, giving him a smile as they all head towards the lunch line. Izuku watches them for a moment, staring at their backs. *I know at least three of the students going on the raid, then.*

Izuku turns, going to walk back to his table, but he pauses. Over in the corner, leaning against a window with a phone pressed to his ear, is Haruta. Izuku thinks, for a moment, that it's nothing--that Haruta is just taking a phone call, that he's not paying attention. And then Haruta glances over at Izuku, and there's something on his face, something nervous and guarded, and Izuku knows. Haruta heard *something*, some part of that conversation. Izuku stares at him.

What do you know? Izuku thinks, as loudly as he can. Haruta's lips thin, and he shakes his head, the movement sharp and controlled. Izuku presses his lips together. He thinks that maybe this is bad, tha maybe this is something that he needs to fix, that he needs to--he cuts off the thought, forcing himself not to think it. Haruta stares at him, then says something into the phone, snapping it shut. He takes two quick strides over to Izuku, his mouth spread in a frown as he stops in front of

Izuku, his blue eyes moving up and down Izuku.

“All I heard--all I got was that you know about the raid,” Haruta says, quietly. “I didn’t hear anything else.” Izuku stares at him. His thoughts are moving quickly, vaguely, but he can’t stop himself from thinking that Izuku only knows because of Gekkeiju, that Haruta can’t be part of the raid because he’s not a hero course student, that there’s no way for him to know except there *is* and it’s Haruta’s quirk. Izuku feels so stupid. The only people who knew about the summer camp location were Aizawa, Vlad, Nezu, and the Pussycat Dolls. Izuku knew, he *knew* it couldn’t be any of them, not realistically.

“I-It’s you,” Izuku says. “It’s you.” Haruta stares back at him, his eyes huge and blue and wet. His pupils are slightly pointy, like a cat’s but just barely, only enough that Izuku can see when he’s this close.

“We can’t--we can’t talk about this here,” Haruta says, swallowing. He doesn’t quite meet Izuku’s eyes, instead staring just below. Izuku wonders if that’s part of how he’s always been, or if Haruta’s felt Fury’s quirk before. Judging by the way Haruta flinches *hard* when Izuku thinks that, it’s the latter.

Tonight, Izuku thinks. Tonight, we’ll meet in the wooded part of campus, and you’re going to explain yourself, he thinks. *I wouldn’t even be in this situation if they hadn’t been at the summer camp.*

“Okay,” Haruta says. “I’ll be there, and--and I’m sorry,” Haruta breathes. Izuku doesn’t want to hear it. He turns and walks away, hating the fact that he knows Haruta can sense every drop of bitter anger and heavy betrayal he feels.

Chapter End Notes

content warning: talk of torture but that's really it

[discord!](#)

did yall like that :D

thank you as always for da support!!!! im so excited to get to the raid itself, should only be a few more chapters

histories

Chapter Summary

last time: izuku wakes up and sees aizawa spent all night with him, izuku talks to nighteye about the raid, shinsou worries, and izuku learns who's in the raid. oh and he knows who the traitor is.

Chapter Notes

HI GAMERSSSS if i miss a day this weekend it's bc i didn't do my damned homed work and im not gonna let myself write unless i've done my FIVE PAPERS that are due sunday night lolz anyway i hope u enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

By the time Izuku slides out of his dorm room and down the stairs, by the time he's walking through the woods, crunching on leaves and listening to the wind whistling through the air, he's angry. It's almost a foreign feeling, at this point. Izuku doesn't usually spend a lot of time feeling angry because usually, he's just upset at himself. Most of the time that people have hurt Izuku, they're either people who there's no point being angry at, people who won't feel bad about it no matter what Izuku does, or the person is Izuku himself. It's almost refreshing, getting to be angry at someone else.

Izuku feels like his skin is crawling with it, with the hot anger that floods through him every time he thinks about the fact that he wouldn't be in this position at all if Haruta hadn't leaked the location of the summer camp. Izuku would just be another student, and Ace would just be another vigilante. Izuku wouldn't be knee deep in this problem he can't fix, this pit he can't crawl out of.

Izuku walks through the woods in near silence, his footsteps barely audible above the soft whistling of the wind through the trees. The moon is full, tonight, and it's casting a pale glow over everything, making the dark green leaves look nearly grey. It's started to get cold out at night, now that it's nearly October, and Izuku finds himself shivering as the night air pierces through his hoodie, chilling his skin.

Izuku doesn't have to walk long before he sees Haruta. The older boy is sitting on top of a fallen tree, in the center of a small clearing. His long, silver-grey hair is down, cascading over his shoulders and down to his waist. His ears perk up when Izuku steps into the space, twitching as Haruta looks up at Izuku with dark blue eyes and too-sharp teeth in his open mouth. Izuku can't help the flash of hot anger that pulses through him, and he hates that Haruta can feel it, too.

"You have some explaining to do," Izuku grits out as he stops at the edge of the clearing, ignoring the way the anger in his tone flattens Haruta's ears to his head.

"I-I know," Haruta says, his voice quiet. His tail lashes behind him, a quick moving piece of bright silver. "I-I'm sorry, Midoriya, but I was under strict orders n-not to tell anyone, even you, and I--" Haruta stops, shutting his mouth before Izuku can interrupt him. Izuku swallows, clenching his

teeth together.

“You’re the reason that I’m--the reason I’m in this situation in the first place,” Izuku says, and it startles him how rough his own voice sounds. “I don’t want to hear about *orders*. I want to know *why*.” Izuku wants to know if Haruta is a villain or not. Izuku wants to know if he should turn Haruta in or punch him or stab him or all of the above. Izuku wants to know if Haruta understands what Izuku’s gone through, because if the villains hadn’t been at that summer camp, Izuku wouldn’t know the burn of Fury’s quirk or the way it felt to have a cigarette pressed to his arm or the way that he ached when he watched Mouse cry.

“I never wanted to go to UA,” Haruta says, quietly, and Izuku’s snapped out of his thoughts. Haruta is watching him with sorrow on his face, his lips turned down in a frown and his brows low. He’s not making eye contact. Izuku takes a slow breath.

“T-That’s not an answer to my question,” Izuku points out, and Haruta nods.

“You should probably sit,” Haruta says, moving his gaze to the ground in front of him. “But I’m--I’m going to tell you everything. You have a right to know.”

Izuku pauses, staring at Haruta for a moment, before he moves to sit cross legged on the ground. The leaves are dry and cool under him as he carefully arranges himself. He *does* have a right to know, but there’s something about seeing the person he’d spent all this time stewing over, something about seeing them sad and resigned that just makes him feel awful. Like a villain.

“You’re not a villain for being angry at me,” Haruta says with a sigh. “I ruined your life.” He leans to one side, holding himself up with one hand pressed onto the side of the fallen tree he sits on. His hair falls in a curtain, sparkling in the moonlight.

“I never wanted to go to UA, but Ema always did,” Haruta says, turning his head to look down at the ground. “Even before we got our quirks in full, we had the mutation parts, and it was pretty much a given that we’d have some kind of sensory enhancement. Both of our parents did, after all.” Izuku blinks.

“Did?” he asks, before he can think better of it. Haruta nods, not looking up at Izuku.

“Died in a car crash when we were nine,” Haruta says, barely above a murmur. “It was pure luck that we weren’t in the car. Ema was sick, so instead of us going out with them, they had a babysitter stay home with us.” Haruta sighs, the air blowing a piece of his hair away from his face. “That’s not important, not for--not for this, anyway,” Haruta says.

“Ema’s always wanted to be a hero,” Haruta continues. “She really looks up to all the big name ones, all the top one hundred and all that.” He pauses, his throat bobbing as he swallows. “I wanted to be a doctor. And then my quirk came in, almost a year late.” He laughs, dry and bitter. “We’d just assumed it’d be the same as Ema’s. Identical twins, you know?” Izuku stares at him, blinking.

“Why couldn’t you be a doctor?” Izuku asks, because it doesn’t make any sense to him, not at all. “I mean, your quirk--it’d be perfect for something like that, right?” Haruta sighs, his eyes sliding shut for a moment.

“No,” Haruta answers, opening his eyes. “It’s a privacy risk,” he says, his voice dull like he’s repeating something he’s been told hundreds of times. “I can’t turn my quirk off, so patients can’t consent beforehand, and I can overhear personal information if other doctors are thinking about it. The laws on quirks like mine are pretty clear--I can’t be a doctor, a nurse, or a therapist.” He reaches up, pushing his free hand through his hair. “The only thing I’m allowed to do, medical

profession-wise, is be a paramedic. There's a loophole, in the law, that allows for that."

"You couldn't follow your dream," Izuku says, as it clicks for him. "So you followed your sister instead?" Haruta's eyes slide over to him, and Haruta nods as he lets his hand fall from his hair.

"Yeah," Haruta says, softly. "Our parents died, and we got put in foster care. There's a lot--a lot of stuff that happened, but..." Haruta pauses, swallowing. "Ema is all I had, when we started at UA. So, when they took me during Ema's summer training camp, nobody even noticed." Izuku stares at Haruta, feeling the blood drain from his own face.

"Y-You're like me," Izuku says. "They took you, and you--you had to make a deal," he says, barely a whisper. Haruta nods, wrapping his arms around his waist and staring down at the ground between them.

"They gave me a choice," he says, his voice small. "Either I worked for them as a spy, and Ema-- Ema got to live," Haruta's voice is choked, thick with tears, "or they'd kill her and make me watch."

"It's been over a year," Izuku says, and Haruta nods.

"Yeah," Haruta says. "I can't--I can't do this much longer," he says, his voice breaking as he looks up at Izuku. "A-As soon as I know Ema's safe, I'm going to--I'm going to--" Haruta opens and closes his mouth, tears shining bright in the moonlight as he looks at Izuku. Izuku stares back at him, and he has the sinking realization that he has to save Haruta too, that this boy he'd been so angry at not long ago is like Mouse, is like Angel. *He's a victim, too*, Izuku thinks. Haruta shakes his head.

"I-I did this willingly," he says, a tear spilling out of his right eye and rolling down his cheek. "I-I'm not a victim, and you--you shouldn't save me." Haruta squeezes his eyes shut, and fat tears run down his face as he sobs. "I just want--I just want Ema to be safe so I can *die*," Haruta chokes out, his voice rough and raw and *oh*, Izuku *knows* how that feels. Izuku thinks, briefly, of hugging Haruta, but he knows from his own experience that touch would just startle Haruta.

"You shouldn't--you don't deserve to die," Izuku says instead, watching Haruta's shoulders shake with silent sobs. He wonders if Haruta's ever gotten to tell someone, about this.

"Y-You're the only person," Haruta says, his voice shaking. "You're the only one--the only one who knows, other than--than the Gekkeiju." Izuku stares at him, and he doesn't know what to say because Izuku, for all that he's been through, has always had *someone*. There's always been someone who knows each piece, each fragment of his secrets, and now he's talking to someone who has no choice but to know everybody *else's* secrets, but has nobody who knows his own. Izuku stands up, slowly, thinks as loudly as he can that *I'm just going to grab your hands, I'm not going to hurt you* and hopes that it works.

Haruta looks up at him as Izuku walks up to him, his arms still curled around his waist and tears still rolling down his cheeks. Izuku reaches down, pulling Haruta's hands away from where they're digging into Haruta's ribs, and Izuku holds a hand in each of his own. They're warm, and Izuku gives them a squeeze as he meets Haruta's eyes and gives Haruta his best determined smile.

"I'm going to save you, too," Izuku says. "I'm going to--I'm going to get you out and make sure Ema is safe, so you won't have to die and you won't have to suffer either." Izuku squeezes Haruta's hands tighter as a sob spills out of Haruta, his eyes wide and deep blue.

"I-I'm so s-sorry," Haruta gasps around his tears. "You--I-I did t-this, to you," he says, his voice

wet and thick. He leans forward, like he's bowing. "Y-You should want to k-kill me, not--not save me." Izuku feels his heart pull in his chest, feels a burst of hot sympathy as he stares down at Haruta's bowed head, at the backs of his feline ears. Now that he looks, there's a trace of a bruise on the back of his neck, barely visible where makeup has rubbed off of it.

"I don't care what I *should* do," Izuku says, feeling like a fire has been lit in his gut. "I want to--I'm *choosing* to save you."

Haruta's only response is a nod, a shaky sob and squeezes from both of his hands, but Izuku takes it. He stands there, holding the hands of this boy he barely knew before today, and he wonders if there's anyone who would ever do this for him.

--

Izuku thinks he's been spending more time as Ace than as Izuku, lately, but he's honestly okay with that. Whatever it takes to save everyone, to protect Haruta and Ema and Mouse and Angel, Izuku will do it. It also helps that he *likes* being Ace, even after everything that's happened. He thinks he should probably hate it, at this point, but it still feels more like the real him than being Izuku ever has.

Izuku doesn't technically know where to find Toga, but he has a hunch. He's sitting on the rooftop of a building not far from the warehouse that he'd overheard the League talking in not long ago, the just-past-full moon hanging heavy in the sky behind him. The air is crisp and clear tonight, with the scent of gasoline and metal sharp on the air. Izuku hasn't seen Toga here, but he's seen a lot of blood in this alleyway--animal blood, he hopes--and a lot of feathers, too. The two buildings that border the narrow alley are abandoned, with the windows boarded shut from the inside, so if Toga's doing something strange with birds, this would be a good place to do it. All Izuku needs to do now is wait. If she doesn't make an appearance, Izuku can just reset and try again at a different spot.

It's only after about an hour of waiting, when Izuku is starting to consider just knocking on the warehouse door and hoping the League is kind enough to kill him if things don't go his way, that Izuku sees Toga. She's not alone; there's that guy who looks kind of like bootleg Deadpool, Twice, walking beside her and talking animatedly. Toga is wearing her typical school uniform, her hair up in buns, and she's cradling something that Izuku can't quite see in her hands. Izuku peers down at them, pressing himself to the rooftop and wondering if they'll notice him, or if he'll have to get their attention himself.

Izuku watches as Toga opens her hands, showing a small brown bird. The poor thing looks terrified, trembling and fluttering its wings in Toga's palms. Toga leans forward, opening her mouth like she's about to take a bite out of the thing, but then she freezes, turning her head to look up at Izuku, and the bird takes its chance, fluttering away quickly. Toga doesn't even look at it, her golden eyes narrowing and a frown spreading on her face.

"Why are you watching us?" she asks, stepping toward the wall of the building Izuku is on top of, tipping her head back to look up at him. Izuku sees a flash of movement, and he blinks as a knife whizzes past the side of his face.

"I-I need to--I need to talk to you," Izuku says, stumbling over the words. Toga blinks up at him, then turns to look at Twice, a confused look on her face.

"Do we know this guy?" she asks, quietly but not a whisper. Izuku takes the moment of distraction to hop off the roof of the one story building--short heights like these, he hardly has to even *try* to land right.

“I’ve never seen him, *I know who he is!*” Twice says, his voice switching between two tones. Izuku watches as Toga glances back over to him, tipping her head to the side slightly.

“He smells familiar,” she says, narrowing her eyes slightly at him. Izuku nods, shakily.

“My name is Ace,” he says, one hand resting on one of his knives at his belt, just in case. “I-I’m a vigilante,” he explains. Toga frowns.

“Are you gonna like... try to arrest us?” she asks, and Izuku sees a glint of silver in her hand. Izuku shakes his head, quickly.

“N-No!” he says, raising his hands. “I, um, actually have a favor I-I was going to--going to ask you?” he says, his lips pulling into a grimace. *I’m definitely going to end up dead, aren’t I?*

“I think this guy’s crazy,” Twice mutters, then adds, “but I like his style!” Izuku swallows, watching Toga as she seems to think.

“What’s the favor?” she asks. Izuku takes a slow breath, drawing air in through his nose.

“I-I work with the--with the Gekkeiju, sometimes,” he says. He sees Twice start, and it looks like he’s about to speak, but Izuku keeps going. “And they hate the Shie Hassaikai, uh, like a lot.” He meets Toga’s eyes, even though the golden hue to them sends a shiver of fear down his spine. “I need you to--to be me, during the raid, and fight against the Shie Hassaikai on UA’s side,” he says. Toga blinks.

“I think we’re on opposite sides,” she says, tipping her head to the side and raising the hand holding her life, the blade catching the moonlight and glowing almost white. “What makes you think that we’d want to help the Gekkeiju? Or UA?” Izuku can hear the threat, in her words. He bites his lip, thankful that the mask hides the sign of his anxiety.

“I-I know that the Shie Hassaikai killed one of your people,” Izuku says. “And--and I know that you guys--that you don’t really want to work with them.” He takes a breath, trying to calm his stutter down a bit. “The Gekkeiju don’t want any quirks to be destroyed,” he explains. “I-I don’t know the League’s goals, but if you help them, the Gekkeiju--they’ll be on better terms with you, I think.” Toga blinks.

“How come you know about big sis?” Toga asks. She sounds more confused than anything, but Izuku supposes that even if he’s misreading things and she’s about to kill him, it doesn’t really matter.

“I overheard you guys the other day,” Izuku says, and he grimaces at the way Toga’s eyes narrow.

“What’s in it for us? *We’re not doing it,*” Twice says. Izuku prays that his first response is the one that matters.

“Well, if you’re disguised as--as me,” Izuku says, resisting the urge to fidget with his sleeves, “you can get away with betraying the yakuza.” He takes a deep breath. “I can also give you m-more of my blood than you need, if that would be something you’re interested in,” he adds. Toga brightens up, her lips turning up slightly.

“You’d do that?” she asks, grinning. Her teeth are sharp, like the fangs of a movie vampire. Izuku nods, hoping he hadn’t just made a huge mistake.

“Y-Yeah,” he says, shifting his weight between his feet. There’s a moment's pause, and then Toga bounces on her feet, looking up at Twice.

“You in?” she asks, and Twice sighs.

“Sure,” he says, then, “ *no way!* ” As he finishes speaking, Toga turns to Izuku, nodding with an excited grin on her face.

“Okay!” she says. “Let’s do it.” She looks Izuku up and down, like he’s her dinner, and Izuku supposes he is, in a way. Izuku swallows, rolling up the sleeve of his left arm. He’d really prefer that he didn’t have to do this, but as far as he knows, there’s no other choice.

Toga reaches out, making grabby hands with her fingers before she takes Izuku’s arm, one hand at his wrist and the other on his elbow, where his sweater sleeve is all bunched up. Izuku tenses when she grabs him, expecting her to squeeze or to dig her nails in, but she’s surprisingly gentle as she raises Izuku’s arm to her mouth. Izuku clenches his jaw in anticipation for the sting of burning pain as Toga bites down on the belly of his forearm, her teeth sliding in. It doesn’t hurt quite as much as Izuku had expected it to, but there’s painful suction as Toga pulls the blood from his arm, and Izuku wrinkles his nose in discomfort as he feels her tongue moving over the wound. He lets her stay there for a moment, until he starts to feel the telltale pins and needles in his arm, and he blinks, pulling his arm away.

“You’re going to--you’re taking too much,” Izuku says, and Toga lets him go. The wound on his arm is bite-shaped, ringed with red swelling from the suction, but it isn’t really bleeding, not at first. Izuku clamps a gloved hand down over it before more blood can rush to the area, grimacing at the slight burst of pain when the fabric of his glove scrapes the wound. He’ll have to be careful that nobody notices during training.

“I know you,” Toga says, licking her lips. Her face is smeared with blood, her cheeks flushed red. “You--you’re Izuku Midoriya,” she says, a smile growing up her face. “I’ve tasted your blood before, at the provisional license exam.” She giggles. “I didn’t think you’d be so interesting! Now I just want to know more about you,” she says bring a hand up to touch her lips with her fingertips. Izuku stares back at her, unsure if the sensation of cold he’s feeling is from the minor blood loss or from her words.

“You--you can recognize people through their blood?” he asks. Toga nods, humming happily, but it’s Twice who answers.

“Of course she can, it’s part of her quirk! *What are you, stupid?* ” Twice says, rolling his eyes dramatically enough that the motion is obvious even through his mask. Izuku blinks.

“R-Right,” Izuku says, pulling his hand off of the wound and looking down to check if it’s stopped bleeding. He presses his lips together when he sees blood immediately start to well up in the bite mark, and he presses the hand back into the wound.

“So you just want me to be you for the raid?” Toga asks, sighing through her lips. “Sounds easy enough.” Izuku nods, swallowing down the nausea rising in his throat.

“Y-Yeah, and make sure that you’re seen by as many people as possible,” he says. Toga tips her head, her smile widening into something predatory.

“Do you need an alibi?” she asks, her eyes half lidded and her cheeks still rosy. “Is that what I’m doing?” Izuku hesitates before nodding.

“It is,” he says, his heart beating fast and nervous in his chest. Toga glances over to Twice.

“This’ll be fun,” she says, voice almost sing-song, and even after they part ways, Izuku can’t help

but wonder if he's made a mistake.

--

Izuku meets with Miura in a park not far from the hardware store where she works during the daytime. He's taking a risk, asking to go out alone on an afternoon after class like this, but Aizawa had agreed so long as Izuku kept his phone on and texted Aizawa hourly. Izuku had just said he wanted an afternoon to himself, to go shopping and to just enjoy the city. He's supposed to stay within Musutafu itself, but that's fine--Miura works near UA, anyway.

The park is a quiet little thing, with benches made of green painted metal and trees that provide shade. There's a children's playground not far from here, all bright colors and twisting shapes, and Izuku spots Miura, sitting on one of the swings and moving back and forth slightly. She's dressed in civilian clothes, her glasses resting on her face, and as Izuku approaches, she turns to look at him. Her face is bruised, with a dark mark on her right cheek and peppering of bruises that look like fingertips pressed into skin on her jaw. Izuku can see the handprint shaped bruise on her throat, even though there's clearly makeup trying to cover up the dark maroon and black bruising. There's a cut on one of her hands, and Izuku can see blood under her fingernails where her hands are wrapped around the chains of the swings.

Izuku's seen her beat up before, but this is another level of brutal, with the current injuries clearly layered over still-healing bruises. Miura smiles when she sees him, anyway, and it makes Izuku's heart lurch painfully in his chest. He can't help himself from frowning as he walks up to her, standing next to her as she kicks at the ground, moving back and forth a few feet on the swing.

"What happened?" Izuku asks, gesturing to her like she won't know what he's talking about. "You're all..."

Miura shrugs, sighing. "It's okay," she says. "I asked Kazuo to do this to me." Izuku blinks, frowning.

"You asked him?" Izuku repeats, and he can hear the disbelief in his own words. Miura nods, her gaze fixed idly on the playground ahead of them. It's too early for there to be any kids playing, since they'd all be at school right now, but Izuku doesn't think this is a very popular park, anyway.

"Angel got in trouble," Miura says. "It was my fault, so I asked Kazuo to punish me instead." She turns her gaze to look at Izuku. "He was willing to, for me," she says, sighing. "I'm glad, because I don't think Angel would have been able to handle another beating." Izuku stares at her, feeling like he's missing something.

"He's willing to," Izuku repeats, "for you?" He feels like a broken record, but what Miura's saying doesn't make sense. Miura blinks, like the confusion is surprising.

"Because he loves me," Miura says, like it's obvious. "He's willing to bend the rules for me." Izuku feels dread, cold and slick and disgusting, coil in his throat, snaking around his ribs and nestling into his chest.

"That's--you know that's not love," he says, feeling sick to his stomach, "right?" Izuku feels things he's heard Miura say, things she's done, *wounds* he's seen on her, all start to fall together, and he wishes they weren't. Miura sighs, looking away from him and back at the ground.

"I know it isn't for normal people," she says, her voice slow and quiet. "But Kazuo, he's not like other people." She pushes off the ground a bit, drifting back and forth on the swing. "He doesn't feel love normally. For him, this really is love."

"He hurts you," Izuku says, and Miura nods.

"He does," she says. "He always has." Izuku shakes his head.

"That doesn't--that doesn't make it *okay*," he says, and he hates the fact that he's having to explain this to her, that he's had to comfort his friends and then Haruta and now Miura. Izuku is *jealous*, wishes that he could *be* comforted instead, and it burns low in his stomach, filling him with guilt even as he wonders why it's his responsibility, why he has to save everyone. He's still *going* to, but it feels a little like he's being crushed.

"I know," Miura says, sighing. She presses her eyes closed for a moment. "I know that, now." she trails off, opening her eyes and glancing over at Izuku. Izuku waits, but she doesn't seem to be saying anything else.

"Now, not before?" Izuku tries, but Miura shakes her head.

"What did you want to meet up about?" she asks, something sharp and dangerous in her voice. Izuku swallows, his throat clicking.

"I'm going to be in the raid," he says. "And I'm also going to be at the tower. I'm going to break Mouse and Angel out." As he says it, Miura's gaze snaps up to him. She stares for a moment before her eyes narrow slightly and she sighs, a heavy breath of air.

"The League," she murmurs. "You're using their quirks." Izuku nods, and she laughs, a small, almost sarcastic thing. "Smart," she says.

"I-I need your help," Izuku says. "I still don't--I don't know enough about how to get to them, about how to stop Yamamoto from catching me." He swallows. "Can you help me?" His gaze meets Miura's, and she nods, sharply.

"I can," she says, and he sees something burning in her eyes. "I have the keys to both of their rooms, and Yamamoto's quirk won't work if the power is out," she says, then lets out an even breath of air. "The darkness will help with the stealth, too." Izuku nods, frowning.

"But you'll get--you'll get caught, if we do it that way," Izuku says. "I-I don't want you to get punished." Miura stares back at him, her face flat.

"I'm prepared to die to save those two," she says. "I've made my peace with that long ago." Her voice is sharp, but Izuku doesn't let it get to him. He shakes his head.

"They're not the only ones I want to save," he says. "And I'll be a suspect, even with the alibi. You're going to have to be alive to lie." He meets her gaze, clenching his hands into fists at his side. "We're going to make it look like Angel and Mouse escaped on their own," he says. Miura blinks.

"How?" she asks, and Izuku isn't sure what he hears in her voice. Izuku bites his lip.

"It depends," he says. "What's Angel's quirk?" Miura looks away, her gaze seeming to slide off of Izuku and onto the ground. Her lips press into a thin line.

"Baton Pass," Miura says. "She can store and transfer injuries between people." Izuku blinks.

"She can do that?" he asks. "Why didn't she just store her own injuries, then?" Izuku can't see a reason why Miura would get beaten up in her place, if Angel has a healing quirk. Miura shakes her head slightly.

“If she falls asleep, the injuries all transfer to her,” Miura says. “She stores them during the day, but they don’t heal while they’re stored.” Her face turns down in a frown. “It’s getting to the point where she won’t be able to stand them,” she says. Her hands clench tight around the chains of the swing, and Izuku nods, shakily.

“Okay,” he says. “Would you--would you be able to survive? If she gave them to you?” Izuku hates to ask it, hates the way Miura looks up at him with something flashing in her eyes.

“Yes,” Miura says, after a moment. Her eyes seem to look past him. “I’d be fine. I’ve had worse.” Izuku nods.

“What if--what if I took out the power,” Izuku says, his voice hesitant, “and you go down there as soon as the power’s out, and she gives you the injuries, then takes your keys?” Izuku swallows. “It would look like she’d gotten Mouse herself, like she’d--like you were attacked.” He stares into Miura’s eyes. “Could that work?”

Miura nods, slowly. “It might,” she says, a hesitant edge to her voice. “I don’t know how you’d cut the power, though. It might work if you sever the lines to the building but I’m not certain.” She presses her lips into a line. “And I wouldn’t be able to get them out, after she’d given me the injuries. You’d need to sneak in and help them out. Ren hasn’t walked in weeks, and she’s bound at the ankles and wrists. There’s no way she’s getting out of those without help, even with the keys.” Izuku nods, then blinks.

“Ren?” he asks. Miura freezes, her gaze sliding away from Izuku, to the side.

“Ren Yamauchi,” she says, and Izuku recognizes that name. “It’s Avenging Angel’s real name.” Miura shuts her eyes for a moment. Izuku takes in a slow breath.

“Miura, how... how do you know Angel, exactly?” Izuku asks. Miura sighs, looking up at him again, something sad in her eyes.

“She...” Miura trails off, sighing again, and it almost sounds like she’s trying not to cry. “She saved me.” Izuku blinks, but Miura has something else to say, looking up and meeting Izuku’s gaze with a fire in her eyes. “And now, it’s my turn to save her.” Izuku nods, and he recognizes that look on Miura’s face, because it’s the one he’s seen on his own in the mirror, when he stares at himself in the hours of the early morning, telling himself that this is all worth it, that he’ll save Mouse and everything will be okay again. That he’s not going to fail her, not going to fail the little girl with fire inside her and soot on her skin.

“We’re going to save them,” Izuku says. “No matter what.”

Chapter End Notes

content warning: domestic abuse, death, and nausea are all mentioned

[discord!](#)

pog ilyall thank you for making my dream of being an author something that is actually coming true <3 <3 also ik i don't reply that much but i read EVERY comment and all of them make me so happy

the rescue, part 1

Chapter Summary

last time: izuku learns the truth about haruta and somethings he didn't know before about miura. he makes a plan to save mouse and angel, a plan that relies on toga providing him an alibi by being "him" at the raid on the shie hassaikai

Chapter Notes

i feel like this chapter sucks way more than usual?? idk it just feels like it's poorly written so i apologize in advance ldhgjdfgh

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

The tower feels different, somehow, when Izuku steps inside. It's a cloudy day, the light from outside barely any brighter than the indoor lighting, the one-way glass barely letting any light through as Izuku lets the door fall shut behind him. He sucks in a breath, then walks up to Yamamoto where she sits in her usual spot, typing away. Izuku wonders if she's doing something villainous, or if she's working on a college assignment. It's strange, to think of her as a person and not just a villain, but after Haruta and Miura, Izuku can't *not* think about it. He wonders if Yamamoto was coerced into this, if she was young and scared and alone. Izuku has to force himself to stop thinking about it.

"H-Hi," he says, and Yamamoto nods in response.

"Fury again this time," she says, idly, like it's not something that sends a pang of sharp fear through Izuku's chest. "He's in the same room as the first time--third floor, second door on the right." Izuku swallows, nodding.

"Thanks," he says, and it sounds a little strained, even to him. He turns on his heels, walking for the elevator. It feels like there's lead in his shoes, like he's got a weight that presses down on his shoulders harder and harder with each step, but he forces himself to breath through the chime of the elevator as he presses the call button, through the soft swishing of the elevator doors as they open. He steps into the elevator already feeling lightheaded.

This is stupid, he thinks to himself. *There are so many worse things that could be happening, so many things that are worse than just meeting Fury. I have no reason to be this scared. He hasn't even done anything, yet.* Those thoughts don't stop Izuku from all but throwing himself off the elevator when the doors open, but Izuku thinks they might calm his fast-beating heart just a hair.

Izuku knows where to walk, knows which door to turn towards as he takes the few steps down the hallway. He wishes it was further, but he also knows that he'd just be anxious the entire time if he had to walk for a bit. He closes his hand over the doorknob, twisting and opening the door. He's not surprised to see the room set up exactly the same as before, with two armchairs facing each other across a low coffee table. Fury's sitting in the chair furthest from the door, a lit cigarette already in hand. As he takes a slow drag off of the cigarette, Izuku shivers. The room smells dusky

with smoke, and it makes Izuku want to turn on his heels and run from the room.

“Izuku,” Fury says, long and slow. He blows smoke out as he speaks. “Why don’t you sit down?” he says, gesturing towards the armchair. Izuku nods, feeling unsteady and shaky and far away all at once as he steps over to the armchair and slides down into it. Fury’s lips turn upward into a sly smile, and Izuku looks anywhere but his eyes behind the sunglasses.

“How’s the mission going? You’ll be at the raid the day after next, I presume,” Fury leans forward, pulling the cigarette from his mouth a moment. Izuku nods.

“I-I’ll be there as Ace,” he says, and Fury raises an eyebrow, hums lightly.

“Interesting. It makes sense, that they wouldn’t trust the real you enough to let you go with,” Fury says, flicking ash from the cigarette onto the table. Izuku watches the pale grey powder fall onto the dark wood.

“I-I wouldn’t have had any way of knowing about the raid as--as myself,” Izuku says, his eyes still glued to the table. Fury clicks his tongue.

“Well, yeah, but you could have tried harder.” Fury sighs, and when Izuku looks up at him, his eyes are half lidded and his cheeks are puffed out slightly, almost like he’s pouting. “You weren’t stupid enough to tell them you’re working with us, right?” Fury slides the cigarette into his mouth. Izuku takes a slow breath.

“N-No, I told them I wanted to--to help stop the Shie Hassaikai,” Izuku says. Truth be told, he doesn’t actually *know* much about the raid, doesn’t know what he’s supposed to have signed up for, what he’s making Toga do in his place, but all that matters is that Izuku can get Mouse and Angel out. Once they’re out, he can come up with a plan to save Haruta and Miura. Then, only then, will he be able to escape. Until then, he just needs to bear this burden quietly. Fury huffs, rolling his eyes as he takes a drag of the cigarette.

“You’re so naive,” Fury says, “but I guess it doesn’t matter if they actually fell for that.” He watches Izuku for a moment, his eyes narrowing, and Izuku looks away involuntarily. He feels something like fear burning in his chest.

“Whatever,” Fury says, standing up. Izuku swallows, moving to stand, but Fury raises a hand, stopping him. “Take your shirt and jacket off,” Fury orders, and Izuku feels a shiver run down his spine.

“Please, I--what did I do wrong?” Izuku asks, wrapping his arms around his chest as Fury steps around the table, walking closer to Izuku. He sighs, like Izuku’s a misbehaving child.

“You know what you did, Izuku,” Fury says, his voice low and condescending. “Pretending that you’re too stupid to understand won’t get you out of this.” He waves the hand that isn’t placing the cigarette back between his lips. “Now, shirt and jacket off.”

Izuku swallows, squeezing his eyes shut for a moment before taking off the formal jacket with shaking fingers. The fabric is thick and warm, and it’d kept him comfortable on the walk from the train station to the tower. He sets it in his lap, then starts to try and unbutton his shirt. His fingers are shaking, though, jerking and twitching so hard that Izuku can’t even get a grip on the button. Fury clicks his tongue.

“You’re so useless,” he says, reaching forward and grabbing the front of Izuku’s shirt. Izuku flinches, hard, and Fury raises an eyebrow as he starts to unbutton the shirt. Izuku tries to look

away, but it's either looking at Fury or watching the way he's being undressed, and either one makes Izuku feel sick. He shuts his eyes, screwing them shut as he feels cool air hit his bare chest as Fury undoes the buttons on his shirt.

"Oh, quit acting like that," Fury says, irritation in his voice. "Take your shirt off and turn around. I'm already being nice by not using my quirk on you." Izuku swallows, pulling his arms out of his shirt and dropping the white fabric onto his lap. He turns the best he can with his legs still hanging off the front of the armchair, twisting his back so that it's mostly facing Fury. He feels cool fingers trail down his spine, and Izuku has to bite his tongue and slam his eyes shut to hold back the flinch that threatens to burst out of him.

"It's easier if you relax," Fury says, his voice a soft whisper just by Izuku's ear, and then there's a burst of searing pain in the center of Izuku's back along one of the bones of his spine. Izuku hisses in surprise, but before he has a chance to recover, the cigarette is being pressed to the bone just below the other one, a fresh burst of hot pain.

"I know you know about Haruta," Fury says, his voice casual as a lighter clicks somewhere by Izuku's ear. "He can't lie to me, you know. He tries, but I always know if he's opened his fat mouth." Izuku flinches as the cigarette presses, hard, to the next vertebrae. "It's really such a shame that he let you figure it out. He's going to have to call in sick to school after I'm done with him," Fury says, a light chuckle in his voice. Izuku can hear the sizzle of his own skin as the cigarette presses into the next bone. He's started to sweat, his mouth filling with sour saliva as he grips the back of the chair and prays that Fury is almost done.

"Do you think I should burn his back, like this?" Fury asks, and there's nails digging into the top three burns. Izuku can't help the little whimper of pain he lets out, and Fury laughs, high and loud. "I could burn his chest, too. He hates it, you know. Stupid little kitty can't even get his surgery because then he'd have to show them what I did." Izuku feels a chill run down his spine as he puts together what Fury's talking about, what Fury's done to Haruta.

"P-Punish me, instead," Izuku says, his voice gasping and breathy but clear. "Please--please hurt me, instead. It--it was my fault." He yelps, small and high pitched in his throat at Fury presses the cigarette into the next bone of his spine. He leaves it there longer, this time, and Izuku has to fight not to struggle away.

"I could be persuaded to do that," Fury says, his voice thick with amusement. "I'm not sure why I would, though." He hums, trailing a finger along the line of searing, burning pain on Izuku's back. "Why don't you beg for it?" Izuku clenches his jaw shut, screwing his eyes closed and ignoring the prickle of tears in the corners of his eyes. He feels tinny, feels vulnerable and naked and small, and he knows that's exactly how Fury wants him to feel. He takes in a shaky breath.

"Sir, please--please punish me, instead," he asks, his voice cracking as Fury presses the cigarette into his skin again. "Please don't--don't hurt H-Haruta, hurt me." Fury's hand grabs the back of Izuku's neck, forcing Izuku's head to bend down. Izuku's forehead presses uncomfortably into the back of the chair.

"Since you asked so nicely," Fury says, his voice almost a purr. Izuku feels the drag of something sharp along his skin, beside the burns, and he gasps. He can feel blood running from the cut, but he can't see it, can't tell what Fury's doing to him. Normally, he wouldn't mind a cut, wouldn't mind the sharp slice of a blade through skin, but when he can't see it coming, when Fury digs the knife through the flesh of his back over and over again in vertical lines, all Izuku can do is brace himself.

The world starts to blur, and time goes with it. Izuku knows that Fury keeps talking to him, keeps whispering things in his ears as he cuts and burns Izuku, but Izuku can't hear him. He hears the

sounds, hears the words, but it doesn't compute in his head.

Izuku is barely aware as Fury presses the palm of his hand to the destroyed skin of Izuku's back, barely aware as something warm and damp washes over the wounds. Izuku thinks, vaguely, that Fury is washing his back, washing the wounds out with warm water, but he doesn't remember Fury leaving the room. Izuku is limp in the chair, his forehead pushed into the fabric and his breath coming sharp and quick through his open mouth. He can hear himself hiss and feel himself jerk as Fury presses the cloth into the wounds harder than he probably has to.

Izuku thinks he must lose consciousness for a bit, because it seems like the world tips and blurs and then he's lying on his stomach on the ground. Izuku blinks, his head aching and his stomach twisting strangely. He can feel bandages over the whole of his upper back, covering the wounds there, and as he lifts his head slightly, he can see them over his shoulder. Izuku blinks dully at the bandages for a second, before a pair of fingers are snapping in front of his face.

"Hey," Fury says, and he sounds some strange mixture of irritated and concerned. "It's not really punishment if you just check out mentally," he says, and Izuku turns to look at him, blinking to try and focus his eyes. Fury is sitting cross legged on the ground beside Izuku, his cheek resting on his palm as he watches him. Izuku can see his golden eye through the dark sunglasses, and he averts his gaze so that he doesn't have to deal with the anxiety that will cause.

"You'd do good in interrogations," Fury muses. "You were totally out of it, wouldn't answer anything I asked you. We should use you on high risk missions." A slight smile creeps up on his face, and it makes Izuku's stomach turn.

"H-How long was I...?" Izuku's throat is sore, rough from breathing heavily. Fury raises an eyebrow at him, slowly.

"About twenty minutes," Fury says, idly looking at his fingernails. "You can go now, or whatever. Nobody's going to see the wounds unless you strip in front of them, so you can't whine about having a hard time hiding them." He looks bored, sitting there like that. Izuku doesn't drop his guard, though, as he slowly lifts himself off of the ground.

His back is sore and painful the entire trip back to the dorms, but he has to admit it's preferable to Fury's quirk. He can hide this, better than the arms and better than Heaven and Hell. It'll suck to be injured when he breaks Mouse out, but he doesn't really have any choice, does he?

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It's unfortunate, really, that the raid is on a Monday. Izuku swallows back his nerves as he slips out between the campus gates, dressed in all black from his jeans to the hoodie to the face mask he's wearing. He'd originally planned to go dressed as Ace, but since the whole idea of recruiting Toga was to try and make it so 'Ace' was at the raid itself, Izuku can't risk being seen in his costume. His current clothes are closer to the ones he used to wear, before joining the Gekkeiju, but he hasn't bothered dyeing his hair or covering his eyes, just his mouth and nose. He's not recognizable like this except to people who already know him, and if anyone sees him who isn't meant to, he'll need to kill himself anyway. Even the Gekkeiju seeing someone vaguely his age and height around the tower during his plan would be disastrous.

Knowing that he's safely off of campus does nothing to ease the ache in his chest. He knows that some of the students and teachers will be out today, for the raid, but Izuku Midoriya has no excuse to not be in class. He hasn't warned anyone, hasn't left a note of any kind--nobody can know what he's doing. Izuku knows that even if he pulls this off perfectly in one try, chances are good that he'll have a giant mess to clean up as soon as he's back. Izuku can't bring himself to care, really. If

he gets Mouse and Angel out safely, it'll be worth any pain he has to endure, no matter how terrible.

It's misty and cool out, not unusual for the first week of October. The sun must have already risen behind the cloud, judging from the way the dove-grey sky seems to glow from within. Izuku can feel his breath puffing out of the medical mask and around his eyes, just like it used to before he switched to the more tightly fitting one. He's really appreciating that costume, now. Even with his arm guards under his sleeves and his utility belt stashed under the bottom edge of his too-big hoodie, Izuku feels woefully underprepared.

He boards the mostly-empty train, his footsteps echoing in the cabin. He's too early for most of the morning commuters, but there are a few people scattered throughout, mostly typing on their phones, the light from the screens casting bright glows on their skin. Izuku takes out his own phone. He'd brought both his normal phone and the one he's supposed to use to communicate with Nighteye and Aizawa as Ace, although he can't really see himself using that one. Izuku wouldn't have brought his normal phone at all, but it's a smartphone, unlike his other two. He unlocks it as he sits in an empty seat, quickly scrolling over to his news site. It's not a sure thing, but Izuku can be fairly certain something will show up when the raid begins. That's the time he can act during, if he wants to have a solid alibi.

Izuku closes his phone, tucking it into his pocket and leaning his head back against the window behind him. He lets his eyes slide shut. His back aches terribly, a pounding of his pulse in the swollen flesh under the bandages. He hasn't been able to unwrap it himself, not with where it's placed on his upper back, and he hasn't been willing to ask someone for help, not when that would mean showing his weakness. Briefly, he'd considered asking Haruta, but he'd remembered what Fury had said, about Haruta being unable to lie to the man, and Izuku had judged it too great of a risk. Izuku's kind of regretting that, now. From the way it feels hot and itchy even in the cool October weather, Izuku's willing to bet that *something* on his back is infected. He isn't sure if it's the line of burns, evenly spaced down his spine, or the cuts that Fury had sliced into his back, or if it's another type of wound, one that Izuku had missed entirely in his haze, but it doesn't really matter. *I can worry about that after today is over .*

The train arrives at his station too soon. Izuku hates the way that time seems to pass so quickly in the small hours of the morning, the way that it seems to evaporate along with the morning dew, along with the thin mist that hangs in the air. By the time he's stepping off the train and into the city, that mist is gone, replaced with a heavy humidity that prickles uncomfortably at Izuku's skin. *It's going to rain tonight .*

Izuku knows the way to the tower intimately, but he takes a different path today. He turns, walking through the streets so that he can approach the building from the opposite side that he normally does. He moves quickly through the streets, examining each building as he passes. If he wants to pull this off, he'll need to get to the roof of the building in broad daylight, without even being *seen* , let alone stopped. Izuku isn't sure that it's possible, really, but when he spots a dingy fire escape crawling up the side of an old, rickety building, he sees a way up. Izuku scales the fire escape easily, bits of rust and flaking paint coming off and pressing into the bare skin of his hands as he climbs. Izuku thinks that he really should have brought gloves, but it won't really matter. His fingerprints are already all over the Gekkeiju base; them being there wouldn't be suspicious.

Izuku reaches the top of the building, only about three stories tall, and he stands in the center of the concrete and brick building for a moment as he takes in his surroundings. It's still a foggy morning, even if some of the mist has burned off, and this part of town isn't particularly busy. Izuku probably has about an hour before the morning commuters start to become a risk for him, so he doesn't waste any time. He runs from the top of his building, flinging himself into the fire escape

of the taller building beside it.

When he grabs onto the fire escape, it makes a loud clattering noise where it slams against the building. Izuku winces at the noise, but when he looks around, he can't see any signs that he was heard or seen by anyone else. He quickly climbs the rest of the fire escape up to the top floor of the building, standing on the railing and stretching up to haul himself onto the roof. This building is larger, both in height and in footprint, and if Izuku can stay at this height until the tower, he should be okay to jump onto that roof without having to climb any of the mirrored glass that makes up the walls of the tower. Izuku has no way of knowing if someone's inside any given room, if someone's watching through the glass, so he needs to be careful. Izuku creeps to the edge of the rooftop that he's on, scanning his surroundings and planning his next move.

It only takes a few more jumps, dropping a couple of stories then climbing back up a few more, before Izuku is standing on a building that sits next to the Gekkeiju tower. It's about a story taller, and Izuku thinks that the gap between the two rooftops is small enough that he *could* make the jump, but it'll be a challenge, especially given that the rooftop he's on now is narrow, without as much room for a running start as he'd want, ideally. Izuku braces himself, sprinting with his shoes scraping against the concrete of the roof. He jumps, and for a moment he's weightless, like he's falling from a height. It's been a really long time, he realizes, since he's killed himself by jumping from a building.

He almost misses it, but before he has much of a chance to think about it, his feet are colliding with the surface of the Gekkeiju tower roof. Izuku rolls through the impact, clenching his teeth together as he rolls over the wounds on his back, but he's able to get to his feet without any major injuries, so he'll consider it a win.

Izuku takes a moment, glancing over the roof. It's a fairly standard one, which strikes him as surprising, considering the luxury of the rest of the building. It's all smooth, pale concrete, with an angled rim to let off rain and an air conditioning unit in the center, whirring softly. There's another structure, something that Izuku thinks is probably electrical in some way, judging by the way the power lines feeding the building go into it, and there's also a hatch in the ground that must lead to the top floor. Izuku ignores the hatch; he doesn't plan on marching into the lion's den of his own volition.

Instead, he gives himself a quiet moment to tip his head back, to stare up at the grey of the sky, puffy and swirled with different shades of stormcloud. Izuku thinks that it'll make it easier to run, if it's raining, but it'll also make things more difficult on Mouse and Angel. It's not like Izuku will be able to put them on a train--they'll be clear victims, hurt and tortured and sick looking. He can't risk that the Gekkeiju gets to them before Izuku can get them to safety, so he'll need to move quietly. Izuku doesn't know if he should hope for it to rain, or if he should pray that it stays dry.

After a moment, he tilts his head back down, steeling himself for what he has to do next. He pulls out his phone and opens it to the news app, sitting down with this back against the air conditioner. The news app stays tauntingly blank, still showing a story from last night about some rescues from a wildfire in another part of the country. Izuku stares at it. Now that he's here, where he needs to be, he has to wait, and it's discomfiting. Izuku feels like there are ants crawling under his skin.

He's not sure how much time passes, but he knows he starts to drift off, flirting with a kind of weak sleep that he jerks out of any time a bird flies overhead or what the air conditioning unit he's leaning against whirs to life or shuts off. Izuku hasn't slept much at all, lately, and he has his phone set to vibrate if any news alerts go through, so he lets himself drift in out of consciousness. There's something peaceful about being atop a roof in the middle of the morning, with the filtered light coming through the cloudy grey sky and the gentle wind that brushes against him.

Izuku thinks that if he didn't have school and the Gekkeiju and everything else, he'd like to spend an afternoon on a roof, maybe have a picnic. He could invite his friends, and maybe in this dream-world it's not just any roof. Maybe in this world, it's *Izuku's* roof, and he's got his own set of tables and chairs up there, his own potted plants and little birds crafted out of metal and glass. Maybe Izuku is out of school, done with the Gekkeiju and everything, and he's just a hero. Maybe he's saved thousands of people and will save thousands more, but he doesn't have the crushing weight of so many secrets hanging over him. Maybe he's whole again.

Izuku's thinking about his rooftop, thinking about a world where he can do things like eat and laugh with his friends on lazy afternoons, when the new notification comes through, making his phone buzz urgently in his hand. He jerks to full awareness, picking up his head from where his chin had dropped to his chest, and he unlocks his phone, quickly opening it to the news app once again. Izuku's getting to his feet even before he finishes reading the title, because he sees Uraraka and Tsuyu along with the dragon hero, Ryuukyuu, in the image, fighting some villains that Izuku doesn't recognize. He doesn't need to, and as he moves to the edge of the roof, another image pops up. It's got him in it, dressed as Ace and fighting back to back with Uraraka. It makes him uneasy to see Toga so close to his friend, but Izuku doesn't have time to worry about that.

Izuku takes out one of his knives, gripping it tightly in his hand. He looks up, at the power line that stretches from a pole into the raised structure on the roof of the building. He knows that he can't exactly just reach up and cut it, but he has to take down the power line somehow. Izuku cocks his arm back, clenching his teeth as he throws the knife, aiming for the powerline itself. It hits with a scraping sound, and a spray of sparks cascade off of the power line, but it doesn't sever, and the air conditioning box near Izuku doesn't turn off. Izuku's knife disappears in the distance, and he just hopes that it didn't hit some random civilian. Izuku bites at his lower lip, looking up at the power line and wishing he knew more about electricity.

Izuku thinks, for a moment. He's seen birds standing on power lines all of the time, perched atop them. He's even seen squirrels running along the lines, scurrying along on their little legs. Izuku's not entirely sure how these things work, to be honest--they haven't had physics at UA, yet, and he doesn't really remember much from his time reading up on electricity before he'd killed himself with it. All he remembers is that the electricity will flow on the path of least resistance, and, well, shouldn't the wire be the path of least resistance? Izuku thinks that, if he were to reach up and pull on the wire, his weight should be enough to at least rip it from its connection with the box. It's not like he can die, even if it goes wrong.

Izuku thinks for a moment, before tugging down the sleeve of his hoodie so that they cover the palms of his hands. Izuku's pretty sure that he'll be fine, either way, but the extra insulation can't hurt. Izuku glances up at the power line, licks his lips, and jumps. His hands contact the power line, his palms wrapping around the metal wire, and for a moment, he thinks it'll be okay, that he was right.

And then his feet touch the surface of the roof, and Izuku feels something bright and hot and staticky. It's what he'd imagine being the static in a television screen might feel like, except it's more painful and it *burns*. He thinks that it kind of feels like Fury's quirk, actually, and then he's losing consciousness as he feels his muscles spasm and jerk painfully.

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When Izuku opens his eyes, his head tilted back to look up at the sky, it's with a sigh of exasperation. He's so *stupid*. Of course that hadn't worked--why did he think that would work? Izuku glances down and over, at the wire in question. It's completely undamaged, of course, and when Izuku moves a hand down to pat at his pocket, he can feel the knife that he'd thrown still

resting there. He breathes a short sigh when he pulls out his phone, checking the time. At least this time, he knows exactly when the raid is going to begin, exactly when he can start to make his move.

Izuku sets an alarm to go off ten minutes before the news notification will come through, and he lies down on the concrete of the roof, heat leeching out of him into the ground beneath him. He angles his injured back at the air conditioning unit, which emanates a soft heat that Izuku can feel soaking into his sore muscles soothing them. Izuku lets his eyes slide shut, and as he starts to drift off for his precious hour and a half of sleep, he thinks, vaguely, that maybe he should have brought Kaminari with him. The boy would be able to take out the building's power in seconds, after all.

Chapter End Notes

content warnings: abuse, torture, manipulation, mentions of mutilation specifically of a trans man's breasts, nausea

[discord!](#)

i hope you enjoyed!!!! sorry again if this was lower quality than normal dfgjhdfkg idk what's wrong with my brian today

the rescue, part 2

Chapter Summary

last time: izuku gets tortured in haruta's stead. then, the raid begins. izuku is hangin out on the roof of the gekkeiju base and shocks himself a little (a lot)

Chapter Notes

HI GAMERS im so pumped for dis arc yall are gonna love it :3c

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Izuku doesn't sleep the entire time that he's waiting for the raid to begin, but it's more solid than the last reset, and it makes him feel soft and comfortable when he blinks his eyes open to the buzzing of his phone. He swallows the drool in his mouth and pushes himself upright, his back protesting the movement. Izuku rubs at his eyes with one hand and navigates to the news app with the other. He knows that he's got a few minutes before the raid begins, but it'll be good to see the *exact* moment he needs to start working.

Izuku scans the rooftop as the news app sits open in his hand, his phone warm from him having laid on top of it while he napped. The rooftop looks the same as it had before he napped, but with fresh eyes, the structure that the power lines connect to pings something in Izuku's head. If he can see where the power lines feed into the building itself, it shouldn't be that hard to disconnect them without touching them, right?

Izuku pulls himself to his feet, walking over to the structure. The wind buffets him, pushing away the last dregs of warmth from having slept with his back to the air conditioner, but it wakes him up so he doesn't really mind. The structure that the power lines feed into comes up to about his shoulders in height, with a strange looking cylindrical piece that three power lines connect to attached to one side. Izuku's standing so that that side is to his left, and he's looking at the side of the structure with a hatch. The whole thing is metal painted with some kind of black protective coating, and he's hesitant to touch it, after last reset, but as he sees the news notification appear on his screen, he supposes he doesn't have any time to be nervous.

Izuku slides his phone into his pocket and carefully taps the metal structure, wincing back even though it doesn't shock him. He swallows, before carefully wrapping his fingers around the latch and tugging on it. There's a little lever he has to hold down, the metal stiff with disuse and digging into the pads of his fingers, but he opens it. It makes a metallic scraping sound, and then Izuku is faced with some kind of a control panel.

There are a number of switches, all with black rubber caps covering the part of the switch that he'd need to touch to move, and the entire board is covered with wires, neatly arranged and insulated, unlike the power lines themselves. The thing is mostly grey-painted metal, but Izuku can see bare metal, too, and there are a few dials. Everything is labelled, but the problem is, it's all in English, and it seems to be abbreviations or code or *something*, because Izuku for the life of him can't

figure out what “BSCCP” or “FZR21” is meant to mean. He does recognize one word, though, and it’s a simple one, in all caps. Izuku swallows, reaching up and flipping the switch that reads “MAIN” into the off position.

He can hear the exact moment that the building below him starts to power down, when the air conditioner shuts off and the building that he hadn’t even consciously noticed was making noise goes eerily silent. Izuku swallows as the wind whipping around him becomes the only thing that reaches his ears. He stares at the control panel-- *breaker board?* --for a moment, before shutting the hatch and pulling a knife out.

Izuku shoves the knife into the latch that he’d had to operate to open the panel, praying that he’s damaging it enough to at least slow anyone who tries to open it. The metal makes a terrible scraping noise, high and grating on Izuku’s ears, as the knife digs through it, cutting through the dark coating and exposing silver-pale metal underneath. Izuku hisses through his teeth as he tugs the knife out, but the latch looks pretty destroyed.

He takes a deep breath, moving to the edge of the roof, and he knows he doesn’t have any time to waste, so the next moment he’s jumping from the Gekkeiju tower to a shorter building nearby, not even giving himself the chance to stop as he rolls with the motion. He runs to the other side of the building, grimacing when he doesn’t see a fire escape there, doesn’t see something that will make this easier. He jumps, anyway, his fingers scraping against the brick sides of the building as he slows his fall by catching himself on the bricks that ring the windows of the thing. He ignores the pain as his fingers are scraped raw from it, instead choosing to scurry down the side of the building.

He hops off of the building’s side and onto the ground of the alleyway, and then he’s running, again. All of his practice moving quietly but still quickly comes in handy, here, even though it’s less than a block that he has to go. He rounds the corner, the tower itself coming into view, and he prays, prays that the mirrored glass blocks enough of the outside world as he runs to the front door. He listens for a moment, hearing nothing, before he presses the door inward just the tiniest bit, so that he can peek inside.

It’s dark inside, because of course it is, and the light that leaks in through the glass is minimal, dim. It casts the entire interior of the lobby in a strange, dark-grey glow, with shadows that seem to move and dance. Izuku can see Yamamoto at her desk, trying desperately to get the computer working, her hands moving over the keys and her fingers moving around the computer itself, like she’ll be able to get it working if she panics enough.

Izuku hates hurting her, but he knows that he can’t risk her seeing him. He aims his knife and throws it, letting it turn over to that when it collides with her temple, it’s the hilt that strikes her and not the blade. She drops like a sack of bricks, her body crumpling first over the desk and then sliding down onto the ground.

Izuku grimaces as he slips into the building, ignoring Yamamoto’s unconscious body behind the desk. He doesn’t have time to check if she’s okay, doesn’t have time to be sure that she’s out cold, either, because Izuku’s never been down the stairs in this building. He knows, of course, that there *are* stairs. He can’t recall if someone had mentioned them to him, or if he’d seen them, but he knows for sure that they’re not by the elevator or down the hallway to the right of them, because in that direction in the basement, he definitely hadn’t seen any stairs. So, Izuku moves to where the basement elevators are, and then he yanks open the door to the left of them. Izuku steps into the dark hallway, moving quietly and listening carefully. He doesn’t hear anything except for his own quiet, whispered breaths and the movement of his feet over what feels like more polished marble.

As Izuku's eyes adjust to the darkness, he can make out that the hallway only seems to have two doors, the one that he'd just come through and one at the end. Izuku slips over to the end of the hallway, his heart beating fast in his throat as he tries the handle of the door. It opens with a soft click, revealing a pitch-black space. Izuku grits his teeth, pulling his phone from his pocket and pressing the on button so that the screen lights up. He hates to use it like this, hates to possibly give away his position with the light, but it does the trick. The soft, pale glow from his lock screen illuminated the stairs in front of him, curling downward into thick, clinging darkness. Izuku swallows, and he starts heading down.

He knows that there are two basement floors and that Angel and Mouse are on the bottom one, where he'd initially been kept when he was taken, in summer so long ago. He hurries down the stairs as fast as he dares, the slick concrete of the steps making him move slower than he wants to. The stairs are well worn in a way that only the basement has been, so far, with the concrete rubbed smooth in the centers of the steps. Izuku wonders if the basement was a part of an older original building, if the rest of the tower was built upon it, but he shakes the thought from his head. *I need to focus*.

He steps onto the first stairwell, and he can see a door that must lead to the first basement floor. He thinks he hears movement on the other side of the door, but he can't waste time there. He continues downward, moving over the steps. As he moves lower, it grows cooler, and he thinks that the air may be getting heavier, thicker. Izuku's heart feels like it's stuck in his throat by the time that he reaches the bottom of the stairs.

There's only one door there, at the bottom, and Izuku doesn't hesitate in opening it. It opens into a hallway he's seen what feels like hundreds of times before, but never in this lighting. With the dim light from his phone and the dingy, cracked linoleum, it almost looks like something out of a horror movie, like a monster made of shadows and spines might come crawling out from a closed door at any moment. Izuku swallows around the pounding of his heart in his throat and walks forward, through the hall.

Izuku can't see very far, even with his phone light on, but he *can* hear, and what he does hear is low, frantic talking. It's just one voice, begging, almost, and Izuku thinks it must be Angel, since he would recognize Miura's voice in a heartbeat. He hurries forward, towards the voice, and he sees an open door, half open into the dark hallway.

"Sumire, what's going on?" Angel says, her voice thick with concern. "You said you'd explain, you said that--that someone else would come, please, Sumire, I can't--I can't be alone right now," she says, her voice cracking and breaking. Izuku feels his heart ache, and as he turns into the room, it confirms his suspicion that Angel had already used Baton Pass to give Miura her injuries.

The room is plain, completely bare except for the entrance to the bathroom at the back. Izuku can't see much except for right in the doorway, where Miura is lying on her side in the recovery position, a ring of keys beside her. She's badly beaten, and Izuku knows from the stretch of dark bruising he can see on her neck, from the crusted, slick blood in her hair, that she's probably worse off than she looks.

Kneeling beside her is Angel, almost unrecognizable from the last time Izuku saw her. Her hair is still in a braid, but it's matted and tangled, with pieces coming out of it. She's rail-thin, and beside her, two pairs of cuffs sit on the ground. Even though she's uninjured, Izuku can see exactly where the cuffs had rested on her wrists, the skin there pressed tight. She's pale and shaking, with one hand on Miura's shoulder and the other pressed into Miura's pulse point.

"A-Angel," Izuku says, and she turns her head up to look at him, her eyes huge and full of tears.

She looks shocked for a moment, her eyes widening, and then she grimaces, pressing her lips into a thin line.

“You’re Ace, right?” she asks, her voice raw and rough, like she’s either been talking nonstop for hours or like she hasn’t spoken in weeks. “You’re the person who’s helping me and Mouse break out?” Izuku swallows, nodding.

“I-I am,” he says. “What did Miura tell you?” He pauses, thinking. “Actually I-I’ll tell you once we get Mouse,” he says, crouching down and picking Miura’s keys up from where they rest on the ground. He scoops them up and sets them in the pocket of his hoodie, then offers a hand to Angel. She stares at it, eyes wide.

“Can you walk?” Izuku asks, shaking his hand. She reaches up, wrapping her hand around it and pulling herself to her feet. She stumbles once she’s upright, and Izuku has to move his hands to steady her by the shoulders.

“I don’t think so,” she says, grimace clear in her voice. “Sorry.” Izuku presses his lips together as he shifts, looping one arm around her back and over her shoulders. He takes some of her weight onto his side, and it’s not comfortable, but it works.

“It’s okay,” Izuku says, distractedly. “We need to hurry. I don’t know how long the power is going to stay out.” He starts to move, shuffling with Angel out of her room and into the hallway. She’s able to walk somewhat, but the progress is a lot slower than Izuku would like it to be. He can see Mouse’s door down the hallway, with its little crayon drawing visible even in the dim light coming from his phone.

“Why are you doing this?” Angel asks, her voice strained. Izuku thinks that walking must be difficult for her, even with him shouldering at least half of her weight. “I mean, not that I’m not grateful, but I sorta don’t see a motive here.” There’s a light tone to her voice, like she’s trying to crack a joke, but in their current situation, it doesn’t make Izuku laugh.

“I just--I just want to save you two,” Izuku says as they reach Mouse’s door. “That’s what heroes do.” He frowns, realizing that between his phone and Angel, his hands are full. “Angel, can you get the keys out of my pocket and unlock the door?”

“Yeah,” she says, and Izuku grimaces and tries not to flinch as he feels a hand slide into his hoodie pocket. “You can call me Ren, by the way,” she says as she pulls her hand from his pocket and leans forward slightly, a huff of air escaping her as she slides the key into the lock. “If you rescue me from villains, you get to use my real name.” She laughs lightly under her breath as she turns the key, pulling the keys from the lock before she grips the handle of the door and turns the knob, pushing the door open.

“Mouse?” Izuku calls. “It’s Izuku and, um, Ren.” He feels awkward using her first name, but when he slides his gaze over to her, she’s smiling. Even with the dark bags under her eyes, she looks genuinely excited.

“Izuku,” Mouse’s voice, small and quiet, comes from within the dark room, and Izuku hears quick little footsteps before he sees Mouse standing by the entrance to the door, her head tipped up to look at him. “Mouse doesn’t know Ren. And the lights went dark but the switch won’t turn it back on.” She pauses for a moment, her huge dark eyes sliding to look down. “Mouse broke a rule,” she says. “When Mouse breaks rules, sometimes they make me sit in darkness.” Izuku swallows.

“You didn’t break a rule, Mouse,” he says. “I’m breaking you out of here.” Mouse blinks at him, her eyes turning back to stare into his.

“You’re breaking me out,” she says, quietly. “What--I don’t know what that means,” Mouse says, and Izuku hates the way that she cuts off the question she’d started to ask. *How long have people been training her out of asking questions ?*

“I’m going to get you somewhere safe, where nobody hurts you,” Izuku says. “But right now, you need to come with me, okay? We don’t--we don’t have a lot of time.” He swallows, casting a glance over at Ren. “We need to get out of the building without being seen, and then we need to get to UA,” he says. “There are people who can help, there.” Izuku takes a slow, deep breath. “Let’s go. Are you okay to walk, Mouse?”

Mouse looks up at him, nodding. “Mouse can walk. Mouse wants to go outside. Haven’t been outside in long time.” Izuku feels his heart clench at that, but he doesn’t let it stop him.

“Okay, follow me,” he says, and then he’s turning, hauling Ren back towards the stairs. He can hear Mouse following behind him, and strangely, when he glances back at her, she’s glowing faintly. It’s a warm, reddish orange light that leaks out from under her shirt, brightest around her throat and eyes. Izuku swallows, resolving to ask her about that at a later date. He switches off his phone, though, because she’s bright enough that it’s more worth it for him to have the free hand.

They move down the hallway slowly, and Izuku feels like every small step, every scrape of Ren’s bare feet against the dusty floor sends a shock of nerves up his back. He can hear his heart pounding in his ears as he tugs open the door to the stairs, swallowing as he moves Ren forward, into the space. *It’s not going to be easy to get her up the stairs*, he thinks to himself as the stairwell is bathed in the dull red light coming from Mouse.

It’s when that light washes over the space that he sees the person standing on the stairwell above and looking down. She looks familiar, with long, white-blond hair and piercing blue eyes that stare down at him. She’s wearing a knee length, cream colored dress and a pair of sheer, skin toned tights that end in a pair of combat boots made of brown leather. Floating around her head is what looks like a number of off-white spheres that ripple and move strangely, like they’re made of liquid.

“What do we have here?” she asks, the edge of her lip curling up, and Izuku feels sick to his stomach because he’s been *seen*, he’s going to have to reset or kill this girl and he doesn’t want to do either of those things. Izuku feels frustration, thick and hot, build in his gut as he replies.

“Why don’t you come down here and find out?” he calls up at her, because the more he learns about her and why she’s the one who found them first in this run through, the more that he can use that information to his advantage next time. Izuku slides his hand into his pocket and wraps his fingers around the hilt of a knife, holding it still-hidden in the pocket of his hoodie.

“Feisty, I like it,” the girl calls back, and then she’s waving a hand. The spheres of strange, cream-colored liquid bend and morph into spiky shapes, like caltrops, and then they’re raining down on Izuku, Ren, and Mouse. Izuku grits his teeth and throws his knife at the one that looks like it might hit Mouse, and then he’s pulling himself and Ren down and to the side, out of the path of the falling spikes. He hears a sound like a shattering plate, and when he glances over his shoulder he sees pieces of broken ceramic all over the ground, in sharp shards. Izuku sees Mouse’s bare feet where she stands surrounded by the pieces and he curses under his breath.

“Mouse, don’t move,” he says, quickly. She turns to look at him, obvious fear in her dark eyes. “Those pieces are sharp, okay? Don’t move.” Izuku swallows around the fear in his throat, and he carefully sets Ren down on the ground where they’re standing under the stairs. It’s not clean by any means, but there aren’t pieces of sharp broken glass on the ground, so it’ll have to work.

“What are you doing?” Ren asks, wincing as Izuku drops her to the ground the last couple of inches. “You can’t fight her, not--not like this,” she says. Izuku grits his teeth.

“What do you mean?” he asks, pulling another knife from his pocket. “She’ll hurt Mouse if I don’t,” he says, gripping a knife in each hand and stalking out from under the stairs, his boots crunching on the white shards coating the ground. The light emanating from Mouse has grown brighter, more orange than red, and her body looks like she’s swallowed a super-powered flashlight. Izuku can see the outlines of her ribs even with her shirt covering her chest, but he drags his eyes away from her to look up at the girl, who’s watching him with a bored look on her face.

“Her villain name is Dollface,” Ren says, quickly and urgently. “She manipulates and controls ceramic, and she’s too dangerous to fight when she has a height advantage on you and you don’t have any kind of protective clothing.” Her voice is thick and tense. Izuku clenches his knives in his hands.

“Her quirk sounds a lot like Miura’s,” he says, and Dollface raises an eyebrow at him from where she’s leaning on the balcony of the stairwell. She waves a hand, and the pieces of broken ceramic on the ground next to Izuku twitch, turning into droplets of strange, opaque white liquid. Izuku watches as the droplets float up into the air, forming those spheres that he’d seen before as drops join together in globs.

“It’s not,” Ren says, but before she can say anything else, Dollface is talking.

“My quirk is nothing like hers, thank you very much,” Dollface says, rolling her eyes. “I can actually *shape* what I control, for one,” she says, and she waves her hands. The spheres shake and jiggle for a moment before stretching out into thin, razor-sharp looking blades, all pointed down at Izuku. Izuku grits his teeth and braces himself as they plummet towards him, like long bones.

“Ace!” Ren shouts, and Izuku hears his own yelp as the ceramic blades sink into him, into the flesh of his shoulder and his back and his chest. Izuku can faintly hear laughing, high pitched and maniacal as he collapses to the ground. He takes a deep breath and breathes through the sensation of blood loss, letting the grip of his quirk pull him away and into nothingness.

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Izuku opens his eyes to darkness, and it sends a pang of fear, sharp and uncontrolled through his chest. He fumbles for a moment, flailing his arms, and then his hand smacks painfully against a wall and he realizes where he is. Izuku takes out his phone, pressing the pad of his finger into the one button and using the light to illuminate the small space. He’s standing in the hallway just in front of the door to the stairs, just before he’d gone down the stairs in order to save Ren and Mouse. He gives himself a moment, just drawing in his breath slowly and evenly, and then he starts going down the stairs, moving as quickly as he dares.

Izuku hopes that his hunch is right as he stops on the first floor of the basement, using the light of his phone to guide him to the doorknob. He doesn’t think that, with the amount of time that had passed since he got down the stairs and they started to climb back up, that Dollface could be anywhere but the first basement floor. He opens the door, and it clicks softly, pushing inwards without any real resistance. Izuku can hear movement, again, the sounds of someone opening and closing doors, murmuring to themselves. Izuku swallows, turning out the light of his phone and sliding his hand into his pocket to pull out two knives instead.

He creeps forward carefully, and as his eyes adjust, he can see the faintest bit of light spilling out from one of the rooms further down. Izuku slides his feet along the ground, moving slowly toward the light. Now that he’s closer, he can hear Dollface’s voice, cursing and swearing in what sounds

like English. Izuku blinks, surprised for a second, but then he continues. It makes sense, with her hair and eye color, for her to be foreign, and he already knows that Sasaki has an American accent, so why not some of her members, too? Izuku realizes, once again, that if he can't knock Dollface out before she sees him, he'll have to kill her. He pauses in the hallway just outside the door, a wave of dark fear washing over him.

He doesn't want to kill someone, not like this. Not when it's something he has a chance to think about, something he's deciding to do. But he also doesn't want to be caught, doesn't want to lose his place as a spy. He can't risk the threat that would come to his friends, to his *mom* if he really, truly angered the Gekkeiju. Izuku's already risking enough as is just doing this rescue mission. He knows, beyond a shred of doubt, that he can't be seen by Dollface.

Izuku takes one of his knives and slides it back into his hoodie pocket, moving as silently as he can. He takes the other blade and draws a line in the meat of his palm, a shallow one that stings but doesn't make him wince or flinch. Izuku waits to feel the blood bead up, and he cuts two more just like it, closer to his fingers. He clenches his bleeding hand into a fist, trying to cup the blood with his fingers as he feels it running down his hand and dripping off his knuckles onto the floor below. It's warm and sticky, and the smell is comforting. Izuku waits patiently by the entrance to the room, because if Dollface can smell at all, it won't take long. Izuku can hear the steady drip of the blood onto the floor, so she can probably hear, too.

"What the fuck?" she mutters, in English. Izuku braces as the light shines out of the door more brightly, like Dollface had just angled a flashlight out. Izuku listens carefully as her footsteps grow closer and closer, and the moment he sees a flash of blue and blonde in the doorway, he flicks his hand out, sending a spray of blood directly into Dollface's eyes.

She screams, more of a short yelp than anything, as the blood gets into her eyes. She reaches her hands up, frantically clawing at her eyes, but Izuku doesn't hesitate. He charges forward with his knife, slamming the blade into her stomach, where she'd been injured during the summer training camp, if Izuku's remembering correctly. Izuku feels the pulse of hot blood around his hands as he yanks the blade out. He grimaces as Dollface sucks in an uneven breath, leaning forward to cup the wound on her side. Izuku slams his hands down, crashing into the side of Dollface's head with the hilt of the knife.

There's a terrible moment when Izuku doesn't think she's going down, doesn't think that this has worked, but then she crumples to the ground, falling on her side. The flashlight clatters to the ground behind her, pieces of misshapen ceramic lying around it. *She must have been using her quirk to carry it*, Izuku realizes as he leans down and picks it up. He shoves it into his pocket and turns, casting one last glance at Dollface before he heads to the stairs. There's red smeared on her face, lit up from the light leaking from the flashlight still on in Izuku's pocket.

Izuku starts back toward the stairs, his feet moving controlled and careful over the ground. He only gets a few steps, though, before he hears a low click. Izuku is whirling around instantly, but he's too slow. The gunshot echoes through the space, the sounds stinging his ears as he feels a burst of red-hot pain through his shoulder and into his chest. Izuku gasps, dropping to his knees as he reaches up to paw at his chest, feeling nothing but bright, burning pain and hot blood. He sees Dollface pull back on the slide of a handgun, her face twisted in a smirk and one eye open, the white dyed red with Izuku's blood.

"Fucking amateur," she says, and then she's firing the gun again. Izuku sees stars, and then he's gone.

Izuku gasps awake back in that hallway by the stairs, his head aching momentarily with phantom pain before it fades to nothing. Izuku swallows, reaching a hand up to pat his chest, feeling for any sign of injury, but there's nothing there, of course. The fabric of his hoodie is dry and warm from his body, no blood or pain or anything. The only ache he feels is from the way his back stings at every movement, but he's able to tune that out at this point. He clenches his teeth together tightly, opening the door to the stairs at the same time that he's pulling his phone out and switching it on for light.

As Izuku climbs down the stairs, he thinks. Dollface is armed, but his trick with the blood had *worked*, if only for a moment. *I just need to do that again*, Izuku thinks as he moves like a ghost down the stairs, his shoes making no sound at all on the concrete. *If I take the gun, and I actually make sure she's out cold, it'll work. I can make it work*.

Izuku slows his breathing to something undetectable as he turns the knob on the door to the first basement floor. He turns his phone off and slides it into his pocket as he does. He knows to expect the light from Dollface's flashlight as he turns, creeping down the hallway once more, sliding his knife from his pocket. Izuku makes his cuts in his palm, sharp fire along the belly of his hand as he steps into place outside the room Dollface is in. He sucks in a breath as he feels the rush of euphoria that he gets from self harm. He swallows around it, letting it focus him as he hears Dollface mutter a curse.

The light appears in the doorway once again, and Izuku braces himself. It feels too easy, because he knows exactly when Dollface will stick her head out, exactly when to flick blood from his hand, spattering it into her eyes. Izuku knows that it'll work, this time, so it's easy for him to launch himself forward, slashing upward at her and drawing a long line along her torso with the knife. When she folds over instinctively, protecting her middle, Izuku slams the knife hilt down onto her temple once again.

Now that Izuku knows to look for it, the tiny pause between when she's hit and when she falls seems so obvious to him, painfully clear that in that moment, she decided to play dead to get him off guard. Izuku knows better than to be fooled. As she crumples onto the ground, he kneels down beside her and starts to feel around her waist, searching for the gun.

The second that Izuku touches her side, Dollface is struggling, baring her teeth and hissing at him. Izuku feels his hand close around the holster of the gun at the same moment that one of Dollface's hand close around his, digging sharp nail into the flesh of his skin. Izuku grits his teeth, yanking at the gun with one hand as he shoves the other hand in Dollface's face, pressing her head back against the floor as he tugs the gun away. He flings it across the hallway, far from the both of them.

As Izuku twists back around to grapple with Dollface, he feels a hot pain in his stomach, grating and sharp in his gut. Izuku gasps, pressing his hand to the point of pain in his stomach as he turns and throws a punch into her face, his knuckles making a satisfying crack against her cheek. Izuku gropes at his wound with one hand, feeling smooth ceramic in the shape of a curved, sharp crescent, almost like a rib bone from something massive.

Izuku grits his teeth and throws another punch into Dollface's head, pummeling her over and over again until his hands are aching and hot and his head hurts. He can hear the sound filling the hallway, the sharp slam of bone into bone and flesh into flesh. Izuku leans back, seeing her face coated in blood and fast-darkening bruises, and he feels kind of lightheaded as he pushes himself away from her, his own breathing loud and fast in his ears.

Dollface is still, this time, her chest barely rising and falling as Izuku scrambles away from her.

The blade made of sharp ceramic is still in his gut, and as he leans back, pain shoots through his abdomen and back in tandem, and he can't help the hiss of air that escapes through his teeth, loud in the silent hallway. Izuku forces himself to slow his breathing as he wraps his hand around the blade where it sticks into him, forces himself to relax as he grips the ceramic bone tight in his hand.

Izuku breathes out as he rips the blade from his stomach. He can feel hot blood ooze out of the wound as he does, and his vision goes white for a moment as the pain washes over him, thick and oppressive. Izuku thinks, vaguely, that it'll really suck if he has to do this all over again as consciousness slips from his grasp and he feels himself drop to the ground.

Chapter End Notes

content warning: blood n guts, self harm, guns

[discord!](#)

thank you all for reading!!!! im hype major hype

the rescue, part 3

Chapter Summary

last time: izuku successfully cuts power to the gekkeiju base, but while he's trying to rescue mouse and angel, he gets killed twice, then passes tf out

Chapter Notes

are yall ready to POG? ready to CHAMP?

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Izuku wakes to a foot in his side, prodding at the wound in his gut. Waking up is not the slow, gentle thing that it is on mornings in the dorm rooms; Izuku wakes up with a rush of pain and adrenaline as he feels a boot digging into the hole in his stomach, bright and sharp with pain. Izuku gasps, trying to pull himself away, but his arms shake, and when he opens his eyes, his blurry vision takes in the dirty floor, smeared with his blood and shining in the light.

The lights are on. Izuku swallows, turning as he hears someone laugh above him, and even with his eyes unable to focus clearly, he can still make out Sasaki standing over him. Her wings are spread a few feet on either side of her, shaking with the movement of every laugh as she giggles. Her eyes, neon green and painfully bright, are fixed on Izuku. Izuku takes it in, blinking his eyes to focus them just as Sasaki raises on hand, leveling a gun at his face.

“You’re so stupid,” she says, her grin pressing her eyes into crescents. “I mean, really. You couldn’t even betray me right!” Sasaki sighs, her foot nudging into Izuku’s wound again, and he whimpers. He can’t move, can’t pull himself away, can’t even speak. His body feels too heavy, too weighted down and cold and stiff. He knows, without a doubt, that he’s going to die either way. He hopes, at least, that Sasaki makes it quick.

“I have no use for broken toys,” Sasaki says, her voice dropping into something low and dark, and then Izuku’s ears are filled with the sound of a gunshot. Everything goes dark, again, but this time, he swears he feels hands gripping him, pulling him back through time and space.

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Izuku blinks, gasping in the dark space of the little hallway. He can tell his hands are shaking, even though he can’t see them in the darkness, and he tries to steady them as he pats his stomach, checking for the ache of a fresh wound or the damp warmth of blood. Nothing. Izuku sighs, his breathing shaky as he gives himself a moment to just breathe in the small space of the hallway.

Izuku knows he can’t wait too long, though. He reaches into his pocket and pulls out his phone, turning it on like he has so many times before. He tries not to think about what’s waiting for him as he opens the door to the stairs and starts making his way down, through the darkness. Something about the stairs, the way the darkness swells up only a few steps below him and makes it look like he’s descending into dark liquid, makes terror rise in his throat. *I can’t end up afraid of both*

elevators and stairs , he thinks to himself, swallowing around the hysterical laugh that threatens to rise in his throat.

Izuku walks past the first basement floor, this time. He's tried that twice already, and he doesn't think that he's going to be able to defeat Dollface there, not without her seeing his face, and Izuku doesn't think he's ready to kill her, not yet. He can feel a prickle of exhaustion at his eyes, but no headache--he's probably got a few more resets in him, before he starts getting really sick. Izuku swallows as he steps off the last step, onto the bottom floor.

Izuku knows what he'll see, this time, as he opens the door into the basement. He can hear Ren's pleading, can hear her talking to Miura. He doesn't waste any time, hurrying down the hallway without stopping. He can tell the exact moment Ren hears his footsteps, because her frantic whispers quiet.

"Who's there?" she asks instead, voice firm and strong. Izuku swallows, tipping his phone so the light illuminates his face instead of the area in front of him as he stops in front of Miura and Ren.

"I'm Ace," Izuku says, even though he knows that Ren will recognize him upon seeing his face. "I'm here to--to get you and Mouse out." He tilts his phone back at her, so that he can see her better, and he sees that same thin, weak woman as before, filthy and shaking as she kneels beside Miura.

"Okay," she says, softly. "Okay. You're Ace, you're the one--you're the one Sumire said was coming." She turns her gaze down, looking at Miura with something that might be fondness in her gaze. "Of course you send a skinny kid to help me," she says, laughter in her voice. Izuku swallows.

"I'll help you up," he says, leaning down scooping up the keys before offering a hand to Ren. "I want to get you and Mouse out of your rooms, but--but Dollface is coming down here, soon," he says as Ren takes his hand, using it to pull herself up. Izuku knows to steady her this time, looping his arm around her shoulders and taking some of her weight. Ren grimaces.

"Sorry, ugh, this is embarrassing," she murmurs, half to herself it seems. She glances over at Izuku, speaking more clearly. "Does she know you're breaking us out?" Izuku shakes his head, biting at his lower lip.

"No, I think she's just--just checking the basement, since the power went out," he says. Ren nods beside him.

"You should be able to take her out with the element of surprise," Ren says, squinting slightly. "I mean, you've got knives and stuff. If you catch her off guard, it's not like she's gonna have a chance to fight back." Izuku swallows.

"I-I don't think it'll be that easy," he says, his throat suddenly feeling thick and swollen. "I-I, um, I saw with my quirk--she'd beat me, if I went to fight her before I got you two," he says. Ren blinks, and Izuku starts moving towards Mouse's door, if only to give himself a distraction from this conversation.

"That doesn't make any sense," Ren says, then pauses. "Oh. You know you have to kill her, right?" Izuku swallows, but Ren keeps talking. "I know it's tough, but if you're trying to make it seem like we escaped alone, which I'm getting the impression of, considering that Sumire's pretending I attacked her or whatever, you're going to need to kill her." She sighs as Izuku stops in front of Mouse's door. "She's killed a lot of people, you know. Sometimes a part of hero work is doing things you don't want to do." Izuku takes in a slow breath.

“Can you--can you get the door?” Izuku says, hating how choked his voice sounds. Ren doesn’t say anything, just slides her hand into his pocket and pulls out the keys, leaning forward slightly as she unlocks the door. Izuku can barely hear it over the pounding of his heart in his ears, and he takes the moment to try and calm himself slightly.

“I can’t kill her,” he says, quietly. “I-I’ve only--I’ve only killed one person before, and it--it was an accident,” Izuku murmurs, his voice thick with pain as the door opens. “I can’t do that again.”

He sees Ren nod as the light from within Mouse’s room, the dull red light, leaks out through the open door. Izuku takes a slow, steadying breath, then speaks louder, so Mouse can hear him.

“Mouse?” he says, carefully. “It’s Izuku and R--Angel. We’re here to rescue you.” He glances over to Ren, who’s giving him a curious look. Izuku curses himself for forgetting that she technically hasn’t told him to call her Ren, not yet.

“Izuku and Angel,” Mouse’s voice says from within the room. “Mouse is--Mouse is in trouble. Mouse is getting rescued,” she says, her little voice thick with confusion as she appears in the doorway, her eyes huge and shining in the light from her own body. Izuku swallows.

“You’re not in trouble, Mouse,” he says. “The lights are out so that we can get away. But a bad person is going to come down here and try to stop us from helping you, so I need you to stay with Angel,” he says, tipping his head to Ren. “She’s helping me.”

“You can call me Ren,” Ren murmurs in his ear, then speaks louder, to Mouse. “Do you know Dollface, Mousie? She’s gonna come down here and try to stop Izuku.” Izuku watches as Mouse blinks, slowly, then nods.

“Doll...face,” she says. “You mean Ms. Suzuki,” Mouse says, firmly, like she’s correcting them. “Ms. Suzuki made me a doll one time, but I melted it,” Mouse says, her gaze dropping to the ground. “Mouse got in big trouble. Mouse isn’t supposed to break things that aren’t people.” Izuku swallows, casting a quick glance over at Ren, who’s staring at Mouse with furrowed brows and wide eyes.

“Ms. Suzuki is mad at me,” Izuku says, speaking quietly. “So I’m going to have to fight her, but it’s okay.” He swallows. “I’m going to protect you.” Mouse blinks, her dark eyes looking so huge on her tiny face. She nods.

“Okay. Izuku be careful.” She presses her lips together. “Mouse likes Izuku. Izuku can’t die,” she says firmly. Izuku gives her a tiny smile.

“I’ll try not to,” he says, and Mouse nods seriously. Izuku glances over his shoulder at Ren, who gives him a small nod. Izuku steps just outside of Mouse’s room, lowering Ren to the ground just beside the doorway, so she can lean up against the wall. She doesn’t make any sounds of pain or protest, but Izuku can tell from the way her muscles are shaking and the way her face is twisted into a grimace that it must hurt. Izuku, briefly, feels grateful that the Gekkeiju hadn’t locked him up in the same way they had done with Ren. He’s not sure he would have stayed as sane as she has.

“Okay,” he says as he pulls away from Ren. “You two stay here, okay? The stairs are on the other side of the hallway, so you should be okay here.” He doesn’t add that, if one of them is killed, he can just restart it all and try again. He has a feeling that Ren, especially, would not be fond of that idea.

“I can fight if it gets really bad,” Ren says, a determined set to her lips. Izuku swallows, his gaze moving over her, all skin and bone and strange impressions in her skin from being bound for

months.

“I-I’m not sure that’s a good idea,” Izuku says quietly. Mouse looks up at him, tipping her head to the side.

“We stay here and everything will be okay,” she says, and Izuku can tell that it’s meant to be a question from the way she says it, like she’s cutting off the end of the sentence. He nods.

“I’ll make sure of it,” he says, turning to face the side of the hallway with the stairs. “But keep--keep quiet, okay?” he says, casting a gaze back over his shoulder. Ren nods quickly, and Mouse bobs her head up and down, her dark curls moving with the motion. Izuku turns back to face forward and creeps away from the dim orange glow that Mouse is giving off.

As he draws closer to the door of the stairwell, Izuku pulls one of his knives out from his pocket. He makes those slashes in his palm, the motion familiar at this point. He can hear Ren’s words ringing in his head, can hear her saying *you know you’re gonna have to kill her*, but he pushes the thought out of his mind. He’ll try it this way, and if it looks like it’s going poorly, he’ll do something else. He doesn’t have to murder her to save the two behind him.

Izuku stops beside the door to the stairs, standing with a handful of hot blood in one hand and the hilt of his knife in the other. Izuku can hear Mouse’s breathing, whistling through her nose, even from here, and it makes something anxious and painful rise in his chest. He wonders if she’s sick, or if that’s just how children breathe.

He can hear footsteps on the stairs even before Dollface--Suzuki, he supposes--reaches the door, and he braces himself, settling into a fighting stance. The door opens smoothly, pushing out into the space, and Izuku doesn’t hesitate. He snaps his wrist out, flicking his blood into Suzuki’s eyes. He hears her startled shout and he moves forward with his knife. He slashes into her shoulder, this time, hoping that if he damages her arms enough, she might not be able to go for the gun. Izuku feels the slicing of flesh through the knife as he hears Suzuki growl in pain. Izuku darts back just as a blade of ceramic lashes out at him, just like last time. It’s another thin, strange blade, shaped almost like a bone, and when it misses its mark, it quickly dissolves into a floating, fluttering mass of liquid. Izuku grits his teeth and pulls another knife from his pocket as Suzuki raises one hand to paw at her eyes.

He rushes forward, knowing full well that he’s being too reckless, but he can’t let her see his face. Izuku slashes at her face with his knives, and he shifts her arm to guard her face at the last moment. His knives dig deep into her forearm, and Izuku can feel the grate of metal against bone as he pulls them down and out of her flesh. He can just barely see her arms moving in the dim light, but Izuku can tell that she’s going for the gun at her hip.

Izuku growls under his breath, pushing himself forward and slashing at her uninjured arm with one knife, the other held close to his side, ready to stab out at her in the next motion. He sees it happen almost in slow motion; his knife sinks into her skin, but she raises the gun anyway, and there’s a burst of light and a flash of pain in Izuku’s side. He hits the ground at the same moment the gun does, wincing at the lightning bolt of pain spreading through his stomach.

“Fucking brat,” Suzuki growls, gripping her injured wrist with one hand. Hot blood flows fast from the wound, and Izuku realizes that it’s the same sort of wound that he’s used to kill himself, in the past. The blood is coming quickly, and while Suzuki seems to be distracted, Izuku grabs the gun, flinging it away from them and down the hallway. It skids on the ground, and Izuku distantly hears his own hiss of pain as the motion irritates the wound in his side.

“Decided to fuckin’ play hero, huh, Ace?” Suzuki hisses, and Izuku feels something ice cold and

unrelated to his wound trickle through his gut. “Wonder how brave you’ll be when I’m hittin’ someone else,” she hisses, her lips turning up in a grin, and she jerks her chin back. Izuku sees the glob of liquid ceramic float up beside her, then launch itself through the air.

Izuku turns just in time to see the solid chunk of ceramic, shaped almost like a sphere but not quite, hurtling towards Mouse. Mouse stands there, her wide, dark eyes glowing orange from within. She looks like a deer in the headlights, her mouth slightly open and her hands raised in front of her, but she doesn’t move. Izuku feels like he’s going to be sick if he doesn’t turn away, but he can’t make himself look away.

It’s only because he can’t stop looking that he sees Ren haul herself up and throw her body in front of Mouse’s, flinging herself like a sack of potatoes. Izuku hears a hollow *clunk* as the chunk of ceramic slams into the side of her head, and Ren drops to the ground. She doesn’t move from her spot there, and Izuku watches as Mouse stares down at her, Mouse’s tiny hands shaking. Izuku wants to go and help, wants to go and make sure they’re okay, but he can’t. He turns back to look at Suzuki, gritting his teeth and forcing himself to his feet.

“Fuck,” Suzuki growls, and Izuku can see her hands twitching. *She must be trying to use her quirk*, he realizes, watching her try and fail to move her hands properly. After a moment, she lets them drop, hanging limply at her side, and then she’s charging forward at Izuku, bringing one leg up in a kick.

Izuku pivots to the side, dodging the kick, but the motion puts his back to a wall. He can’t dodge the next kick that Suzuki throws, aimed right at his wound. Izuku sees stars for a moment, and he drops to his knees on the floor. Suzuki’s knee collides with the underside of his jaw, and Izuku hears himself gasp in pain, his teeth clacking together loudly.

“S-Stop,” a shaky voice says, and Izuku turns to see Mouse standing in front of Ren’s unconscious body, glowing bright like she’s been lit aflame from the inside and clutching the pistol in her two tiny hands. The gun is pointed at Suzuki, and even though Mouse’s hands are shaking, Izuku knows it won’t be hard to hit Suzuki, not from this distance. Izuku tries to open his mouth, to tell Mouse not to do it, that it’s okay, but Suzuki kicks him again, the toe of her boot digging into the gunshot wound in his side, and Izuku feels himself choke and sputter.

“What are you gonna do, shoot me?” Suzuki asks, tauntingly. “You’ve never even held a gun, you don’t know how to--” Suzuki is cut off by the flash and loud bang of a gunshot. Izuku blinks, swallowing as he watches her drop to the ground, a bloody hole in the side of her head. He feels like he’s falling, feels like the world is tilting as he watches blood bubble up from the wound. Suzuki’s eyes are still open, stained with blood that makes the white of her eyes almost pink. The reflection of Mouse’s fire, orange and red like candle flame, shines in the wetness of her eyes and in the moisture of the blood that quickly stains her blonde hair dark. Izuku swallows back bile.

“I killed her,” Mouse says, and Izuku turns his head to look at her. She doesn’t look scared, doesn’t look hurt. Her face is blank, calm as she drops the gun to the ground.

“Mouse...” Izuku says, but his jaw hurts from Suzuki’s kick and his throat is too tight for him to force anything else out. Mouse meets his eyes.

“Izuku didn’t want to kill her, but Mouse has killed lotsa people,” Mouse says, her face blank. “Mouse doesn’t mind. I’m good at killing. It’s why I’m dangerous,” she says, nodding like she’s agreeing with herself. Izuku swallows heavily, trying to push back the nausea that fills him.

Izuku swallows, dropping his knives to the ground and reaching up to put pressure on the wound in his gut. He winces as he digs his fingers in, pressing hard on the wound as he stands up on shaky,

uneven legs. Mouse watches him, her eyes wide and her lips parting slightly.

“Is--Izuku isn’t going to die,” Mouse says, quietly. Izuku shakes his head, ignoring the way that his head aches and the world swirls.

“Not gonna--not gonna die,” he says, his breath coming too quick as he shuffles over to Ren. Izuku kneels on the ground, pressing two fingers from his free hand into Ren’s neck. He can feel a pulse, strong and steady, and when Izuku feels her skull, he can’t feel any bleeding or anything cracked, just greasy, sweaty skin. Izuku doesn’t know enough about first aid to be *relieved*, necessarily, but he feels slightly better for it.

“Mouse,” Izuku croaks, his voice coming out strained. “I need you... I need you to help me get Ren on my back.” Izuku thinks that he can feel his own bleeding slowing slightly, but he doesn’t want to risk taking his hand off of the wound in his side. Mouse blinks up at him, then nods.

“I help,” Mouse says, moving to kneel by Ren. Izuku swallows, bracing himself.

“I need you to help me get her arms around my shoulders,” Izuku says. “Then, I’m gonna hold her legs with one arm, and I’m gonna hold her arms with the other,” he says. He swallows, leaning down and using one arm to help Mouse as she maneuvers Ren into a semi-upright position. Izuku uses his free hand to hold her arms while Mouse positions Ren’s legs over Izuku’s shoulder. She’s surprisingly strong, for a girl her age, and Izuku can feel a strange, unnatural heat coming off of her, like a furnace.

“You know the fireman’s carry?” Izuku asks as he braces himself, swallowing as he pulls his hand from his wound, wraps his arm over Ren’s legs, and quickly places his hand back over the wound. The pain blurs his vision and makes him feel dizzy for a moment, but he forces himself to focus on Mouse’s reply.

“Mouse’s dad used to carry me like this,” Mouse says, and there’s *pride* in her voice, bright and happy. “Said it was way easier than piggyback because Mouse struggles too much,” she says. Izuku swallows.

“Can you help--can you help me up, Mouse?” he asks, his voice cracking. Izuku wonders if he might have a concussion, because he’s developing a headache that pounds around the fine bones of his skull. Mouse nods, and as Izuku struggles to his feet, her tiny hands steady him. Her palms are so warm they’re almost uncomfortably hot, like hot water straight from the tap. Izuku can understand, now, how she’d melted that water bottle.

“Okay,” Izuku says, more to himself than anything. “Okay, you’re doing great,” he says, soft under his breath. Mouse looks up at him, eyes huge and wet.

“We’re gonna get out of here,” Mouse says, and Izuku can hear *hope* in her voice. “Izuku said I’m doing great, so we’re gonna get out of here.”

“Yeah,” Izuku says, his mouth suddenly dry. “We’re gonna get out of here,” he whispers. He starts to walk, gritting his teeth as the motion stretches and pulls at the wound in his side. Izuku can feel that the bullet had hit him just a few inches from his side, and he can tell there’s no exit wound, no place where the bullet escaped. He wonders, briefly, if Miura could pull the bullet out for him, but then he remembers that the Gekkeiju can’t see these injuries, or they’d know. Izuku swallows, praying that the marks from his knives on Suzuki aren’t enough to give him away.

“Hey Mouse,” Izuku says, swallowing down blood in his mouth that he hopes is from a bloody tooth and not from something else. “Is your dad... would he be looking for you?” Izuku asks as

Mouse hops in front of him, tugging on the doorknob to the stairwell. Izuku steps into the stairs, swallowing as he glances up at the two flights of stairs between him and the ground floor. He already feels like he's falling through the ground with exhaustion, and they haven't even started.

"Oh," Mouse says, tipping her head to the side slightly. "I killed my dad," Mouse says, casually, like it doesn't mean anything. Izuku feels his heart jump into his throat, and he freezes.

"What?" he asks, the words coming out choked and strained. Mouse looks at him, blinking slowly.

"When Mouse got the quirk, Mouse killed both of my parents," Mouse says. "That's why nobody is ever gonna look for me." Izuku blinks.

"Oh," he says, and he doesn't think that he can breathe for the shock. "Mouse, I'm so--I'm so sorry," he says, as gently as he can. Mouse tips her head to the side, like she doesn't understand.

"I think Izuku needs to climb the stairs to leave the facility," Mouse says, her eyes drifting over to the steps. Izuku swallows, turning towards the stairs, and he starts to walk up them one at a time. Each step sends a tearing, sharp pain through his gut, and Izuku has to clench his jaw shut tight to stop himself from whimpering or crying out. It's not the worst pain that he's been in, but the way that his wound is aching and burning without any relief, the way his head feels heavy and sore, it bears down on him like a weight on his shoulders. Izuku supposes it doesn't help that he's carrying an actual weight on his shoulders, either. He can feel Ren's breaths against the skin of his neck, warm and damp on his skin.

Izuku doesn't know how long it takes them to reach the top of the stairs, but when they do, Mouse is trailing silently alongside them, the air filled with Izuku's panting. His breathing sounds strained, harsh and painful, and if Izuku wasn't the one making the sounds, he'd be concerned for the person making them. Izuku swallows, letting his eyes slide shut for a moment as Mouse darts in front of him and Ren, opening the door. *It's nice that she glows*, Izuku muses. *I'm not sure how I'd carry a light, too.*

Izuku follows Mouse into the first floor lobby, noticing the way she hangs back. The lobby is lit up in pale, grey light, and Izuku can see Yamamoto still unconscious behind the desk. He swallows, hurrying through the space towards the mirrored glass doors. He can't see anyone on the other side, the street that the building faces blissfully empty, and Izuku stops just in front of the doors, waiting for Mouse to hop in front of him and open the door, just like she's done before.

"Mouse?" he asks, gently. Mouse is standing a few feet back, her tiny hands fisted in the fabric of her shirt, white and oversized on her small frame.

"Can I--Can I really go outside?" Mouse asks, her voice soft. Izuku sees the flash of fire in her irises, and hectares back at her, something in his chest tightening.

"Yeah, Mouse," he says, and he watches the flame of her quirk snuff out in her eyes. "You can come outside," he says, and he watches the first smile he's ever seen on Mouse's face, a tiny, barely-there thing, creep up on her lips.

"Okay," Mouse says, stepping forward and tugging the doors open. Izuku grits his teeth and starts moving again, ducking towards the first dim alleyway that he sees. As the doors to the Gekkeiju tower shut behind him, a few fat drops of ice-cold rain fall from the sky, staining the sidewalk around them with dark splotches. Izuku takes a slow, steadying breath.

This is going to be a long journey, he thinks to himself.

By the time the rain has completely soaked through Izuku's clothing, leaving him dripping wet and cold and shivering even with the warmth of Ren's body draped over his shoulders, they've made it a fair distance across town. The sun is setting to their right, illuminating the grey, stormy sky with patches of orange and gold that peek through the cracks in the crowd cover. Izuku's wound has stopped bleeding, he thinks, but the water that soaks through his hoodie and runs down his pant leg and onto the ground is stained a dirty, dark red color.

They've stopped for a moment underneath a bridge, the river just in front of them a churning slate-grey color in the dim light. The water that's been falling from the sky in buckets has made the river swollen and angry, the water lapping up against the sidewalk that snakes under the bridge and into what looks like a park on either side of them. Izuku is sitting, leaned back on the damp earth beneath the bridge, with Mouse at his side and Ren still more or less draped across his shoulders. She's glowing, again, even though it had seemed to stop for the most part while they travelled through the city. Mouse meets his eyes with her dark ones, and she creeps closer to him, the warmth emanating from her body soaking into Izuku's freezing bones.

"You're cold," Mouse says, her voice quiet and confused. "Mouse doesn't get cold unless Mouse is hurt bad," she says, extending a hand and setting it on Izuku's forearm. Her palm is scalding-hot, but through the fabric of the hoodie, it's almost nice. Izuku swallows, blinking in the dim, red-orange light.

"It's going to be night, soon," Izuku says quietly. "I think we should rest for a bit." His voice is hoarse. His head pounds with each beat of his heart. He slides one hand into his pocket, pulling out his phone. There are so many notifications on his screen, missed calls and unread messages, but Izuku just looks at the time and unlocks his phone to the news app.

It's 6:21 p.m., and they're not even halfway to UA. Izuku feels something sharp and frustrated rising in his throat, but he pushes it down. The news app doesn't give any hint to whether or not the Gekkeiju is looking for him, but it does tell him one thing. The top headline reads, *Heroes raid yakuza base, 17 injured in battle*. Izuku clicks open the article, only getting far enough to see that three heroes were in critical condition before his vision starts to blur and meld together. Izuku clenches his teeth together, sliding his phone into his pocket again.

"Just a minute of rest," Izuku says, taking a deep breath. He tilts his head back, staring at the underside of the bridge. He counts to ten slowly in his head, then does it three more times before he sighs, leaning forward and fixing his grip on Ren.

"We have to keep going," he says, mostly to himself, but Mouse nods at him, something that could be concern or just confusion on her face. Izuku stands up, groaning, and then he starts to walk once more.

Chapter End Notes

content warning: guns, depiction of a dead body, nausea, injuries n such

[discord!](#)

i hope you enjoyed!!!! this arc should only have 1-2 more chapters

the journey home

Chapter Summary

last time: izuku escaped the tower with mouse and angel after mouse killed dollface.
they began the long journey back to UA

Chapter Notes

HI GAMERS here's a chapter djfghkdfj idk what to say im just excited for this one! it's in kind of small scenes compared to normal but you'll see why, anyway i hope it's as good as usual!!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

The sky is dark, an inky almost-black above their heads as Izuku drags himself along the sidewalk. The ground is covered in a thin layer of water from the rain still falling heavy on their heads, and every step makes a low sloshing noise, his shoes squelching wetly. Izuku can hear his own breathing even over the steady thrum of the rain, the sloshing of his feet, and the rumble of thunder. He sounds like he's dying--his breaths come fast and harsh, wheezing and shallow. In comparison, Ren's calm breathing in his ear is soothing, even though Izuku hasn't missed the way that it's gotten slower and slower the longer they've been travelling. He feels sick to his stomach if he thinks about it, so he's stopped thinking about it at all.

Mouse isn't glowing, not right now. Izuku wonders if it's something she has control over, or if it's just when she's stressed, but he doesn't want to waste his breath asking her. He'd had to ask her to take his phone out, to check the battery and the news about an hour or two ago, and just the effort of talking had made his vision go blurry and wrinkled around the edges. Izuku knows that if he were to fall, he wouldn't be getting up, not now.

He stopped shivering hours ago, which he knows is a bad sign, but he somehow can't bring himself to care. All he can think is that, if he isn't shivering, he isn't wasting energy that he'll need to keep walking. They've been walking for well over twelve hours, now, and Izuku thinks he can see a familiar stretch of skyline up ahead, where the suburbs they're walking through bleeds back into city. He hopes that it's not just wishful thinking.

It makes something in Izuku's chest ache, when he sees the bench. It's not far ahead, maybe about two hundred feet away, and it's the kind of painted metal that will be freezing cold in this weather, the kind of bench that Izuku wouldn't even look at twice normally. Now, it looks like a gift from the heavens, like it was placed there along this lonely sidewalk specifically for Izuku.

"I'm gonna..." Izuku swallows, taking in more air. "Gonna take a break," he finishes. Mouse looks up at him, nodding. The streetlamps bulbs a few feet away cast reflections of pale gold on her eyes, little glares of light that make her eyes seem even bigger, make her look even younger as they walk towards the bench.

"Okay," Mouse says, quietly. "We're almost there," she says, tipping her head to the side. Izuku

swallows.

“I think we’re close,” Izuku says, and it’s the truth even if he knows Mouse didn’t technically ask a question at all. “But I don’t know.” He swallows, lowering himself onto the bench. The metal is cold, underneath his legs, like he’s expected it to be, but he still sighs softly as he sinks into it. Ren’s weight is heavy on his shoulder, but Izuku doesn’t put her down. He knows he wouldn’t be able to get her back up onto his shoulders.

Izuku glances to the side as Mouse sits down on the bench beside him. She sighs softly through parted lips as the light in her chest flickers to life. Izuku blinks as the warmth starts to wash over him, and Mouse leans against Izuku’s side. Izuku doesn’t flinch, not just because he’s far too tired for that, but because he knows full well that even this much contact must be a huge thing for her. Izuku’s grateful for it, because the warmth soaks into his bones and eases the sharp cold that permeates his whole body.

“Mouse,” Izuku says, his voice slurred, his lips heavy. “What time... what time is it?” Izuku swallows as he feels Mouse slide a tiny, warm hand into his hoodie pocket. She pulls out the phone, her thumb pressing the button. Cool light washes over her face, contrasting strangely with the orange glow coming from within her.

“11:44,” Mouse says, quietly. She sets the phone in her lap, the light still glowing. Izuku blinks, slowly, before he relaxes, letting his eyes slide shut.

“M gonna sleep for a bit,” Izuku says. “Wake me up if you need something, okay?”

“Okay,” Mouse says, her voice quiet. “You’re gonna be okay,” she says, with that special tone that she uses when she wants to ask a question but can’t. Izuku swallows, his mouth dry and his tongue tasting like old blood.

“I think so,” he murmurs. The sound of the rain falling around them grows dimmer and dimmer, until Izuku falls asleep.

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Izuku blinks his eyes open slowly, to the steady thrum of rain and a warm weight pressed into his side. His head is throbbing, but he’s not surprised, given that he’s pretty sure he has a mild concussion. Izuku swallows, shifting and stretching his neck slightly. Ren is resting on his neck and shoulders, like a weighted blanket that might be slowly dying. Izuku’s relieved to hear that her breathing doesn’t seem to have slowed any more, that she doesn’t seem to have gotten any weaker as he slept. Izuku glances to the side, at Mouse. She’s still leaning against him, and when Izuku looks at her, she tips her head up to look at him.

“I thought you were gonna sleep,” Mouse says. Izuku blinks, feeling his brows furrow.

“I did,” Izuku says, swallowing. Mouse blinks slowly at him. She shakes her head, just the tiniest bit.

“Not long,” she says. “Mouse didn’t even notice.” Izuku feels cold dread pool in his stomach. He knows he’d fallen asleep, knows that he’d been out for a while. He remembers dreaming, vaguely, of forests and rain and little people made of soot. He swallows heavily. His head really does hurt.

“What time is it, Mouse?” Izuku asks. “Can you--can you show me the phone?” Mouse blinks at him, lifting the phone and holding it up.

“Mouse just showed you,” Mouse says, sounding confused. She holds up the phone. The screen

reads 11:44 p.m. Izuku feels like he's going to be sick.

"I fell asleep," Izuku says, softly. What he doesn't say is that he's pretty sure he died, pretty sure something went wrong when he slept, something made his quirk activate and save him.

"You didn't," Mouse says, sounding confused. Izuku takes a deep breath.

"We have to keep going," he says, and he stands up, ignoring the way it makes his head ache, the way his muscles protest, the way the wound in his side throbs with the motion. Even if it hurts, even if he feels sick, he can't rest. If he falls asleep, he's not going to wake up.

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By the time the rain stops, by the time the clouds break in the sky and show a moon that's almost thinned to the third quarter, hanging low and pale in the sky, they've reached the edge of Musutafu. Izuku can tell that he's running out of time, can feel it in the way that his fingers and toes have gone numb, the way that his vision is spinning and twisting, the way that he keeps forgetting why he's walking, the way that Mouse keeps having to steady him, keeps grabbing onto the edges of his pants and tugging him to keep him upright.

The ground is still slick under Izuku's feet, so it's no surprise, really, when he slips. Izuku barely even feels it, might not even notice the way that his foot twists and he falls forward if it weren't for Mouse's little gasp, weren't for the way that his knee cracks against the concrete before the rest of him hits the ground. Izuku feels caught off guard more than anything, feels the aching in his side worsen, and when he drags a hand down to grope at his side, he feels hot blood rush out over his fingers. Ren is lying on the ground in front of him, still breathing.

"Izuku," Mouse says, her voice frantic. "Izuku, you gotta get up. We're almost there, you said." She grabs his shirt, tugging at it sharply, shaking him. Izuku feels warm, suddenly, and it's a nice feeling. He breathes out, letting his eyes slide shut.

"We're almost there," he echoes, his voice weak. "I-I just--I just need to get back up," he says, scrabbling his hands against the ground, trying to pull himself up. His hands press against the cold, slick concrete, wet with rain and sticky with his blood. *I'm bleeding again*, he notes, dully. His body feels numb and cold, and even though he's not really moving, his head is spinning like nothing else. He stops trying to lift himself up.

"I'm dying," he murmurs, face pressed into the ground. "Can't get up, gonna die," he says. He can hear Mouse's shaky intake of breath above him, but his vision is too blurry for him to be able to see anything but the dull glow under her skin.

"No, you can't," Mouse says, firmer than Izuku's ever heard him. "We're almost there. Mouse is gonna be somewhere safe and then Izuku will be safe too. We're almost there!" Her voice rises, almost to a wail. It sends a lightning bolt of pain through Izuku's skull, sharp between his eyes, and Izuku swallows as he shifts one hand, feeling around for a moment before he manages to set his hand over Mouse's.

"Mouse," he says, his voice sounding far, far away. "I'm gonna come back, okay?" He swallows, squeezing her hand. "You gotta--you gotta trust me, 'kay?" He knows his words are slurred, but he hopes that he's at least clear enough for her to understand. *This would be so much easier if she'd remember*, Izuku thinks, to himself. *Because this way, she's not going to know why I'm going to suddenly get sicker, and it's just going to scare her.*

"I trust you," Mouse says, and the hand Izuku's clutching grows warmer, hotter. "Mouse trusts

you. So you gotta come back,” she says, and it’s the last thing Izuku hears before the buzzing in his head rises to a roar. He feels the pain and the cold and the dizziness all start to bleed away as he feels the grip of his quirk dig into his skin, and he’s tugged backwards through time once again.

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Izuku blinks into awareness with a heavy ache in his stomach, almost as strong as the pain from the gunshot wound. His head is buzzing with the familiar, bright-achey-sharp headache of his quirk drawback, and Izuku has to shut his eyes and swallow, hard, to stop himself from vomiting. He can taste the blood at the back of his throat, can taste the acid that rises into his mouth, but he knows that if he falls, he won’t be getting back up again. He takes a steadying breath, opening his eyes, and he sees that they’re in the same spot that they’d been before he’d tripped, just a few paces back.

“Izuku?” Mouse says, her voice confused and tight. Izuku blinks, turning his head to see her staring up at him with wide, teary eyes. “You came back,” she says, and Izuku feels his own eyes widen. He blinks, swallowing.

“You--you remember?” he asks, and *wow* does his voice sound awful. Izuku’s stomach rolls, again, and Izuku just manages to lean to the side and out of the way before he’s spitting up a dark red mixture of blood and bile. He’s thankful there’s not much in his stomach, because with Ren’s weight on his back, he doesn’t dare lean over. The vomit spills down his front, instead, and the coppery, sour smell of it is almost enough to make him hurl again.

“You’re okay,” Mouse says, almost a shout, and Izuku knows it’s a question, knows it’s Mouse’s way of asking, but it’s still almost soothing to hear someone say those words to him. *You’re okay*, he thinks to himself, then spits the remaining vomit from his mouth and turns to look at Mouse again.

“Yeah,” he says, “but I need your help.” Izuku swallows, takes a deep breath that aches through his whole chest and abdomen, sharp and bright and painful. “Can you--will you help me walk? If I trip again, if I fall--”

“You’ll die,” Mouse says, quietly. The words seem wrong in her mouth, in the mouth of a child, and Izuku feels guilt flicker up at the thought that he’s asking this of her.

“Yeah,” he says, voice rough. “I’ll die.” Mouse presses her little lips together, grimacing, but she nods, quickly.

“Mouse can do it,” she says. “Mouse can help Izuku walk, because Izuku saved Mouse from the bad guys.” Mouse breathes out, and Izuku can see a few tiny orange embers puff out with the air. “Mouse is gonna save Izuku, now.”

Izuku swallows, nods, because as much as he wishes that Mouse didn’t have to do this, that he could bundle her up in a blanket and keep her safe, they have no choice, not now. Izuku has to get the two of them to UA, where the Gekkeiju can’t swoop in, can’t find them when they’re this vulnerable. Izuku doesn’t know what he’ll do when he gets there, doesn’t know what will happen to them, doesn’t even know if they’ll *survive*, but he can’t let himself worry about that right now. Izuku lets Mouse wrap one arm around his hips, steadying him slightly. She’s still so weak, so small and frail, but compared to the way Izuku’s swaying and lurching just standing still, it’s something. Izuku takes a deep breath.

“Ready?” he asks, and Mouse gives him a small nod. Izuku swallows, and they start to move forward.

Progress is slow, even slower than before, and the last couple hours of their journey feel like a blur, a smear of nothingness and pain. Izuku vaguely registers the times where they have to stop, where Izuku spits up blood again and again from his stomach, where Izuku almost trips and Mouse catches him, where he forgets what they're doing until Mouse asks him why he stopped walking, if they were at UA yet. She never *really* asks the questions, just says an answer like she wants it to be true, and it's all Izuku has to ground him as they drag themselves through the streets of Musutafu, bruised and bloodied and sick.

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When they finally, finally turn that last corner, step out from that last building to stand in front of the gate to UA, Izuku thinks he might cry from sheer relief. He steps in front of the gate, staring up at it, and a sob rises in his throat, hot and painful. He swallows it down, ignores the prickling of tears in the corners of his eyes.

"We're home," is what he croaks out through his sore throat, what he finally says. "We made it, Mouse." Izuku watches as Mouse, glowing a faint, dull red by his side, looks up at him, something shining in her eyes.

"We made it," she says, softly. "We're home." Izuku swallows, nods.

"We're home," he says again, and it's like his legs can't take it anymore, can't handle holding him up now that the journey is done. He feels his knees start to buckle, and he has the sense to step to the side, turning to press his back against the wall that forms one side of the gate. *I can't get them through the barrier*, he thinks, tiredly. *I need to call someone*.

"Mouse, get Ren off of my shoulders," Izuku says, swallowing and letting himself slide down the wall, resting against the soft grass under him. Mouse blinks, hurrying towards him, and Izuku can barely even move his arms off of Ren to help her as she drags Ren's limp body forward, into Izuku's lap instead of on top of him. Izuku draws in a slow, shaky breath as he paws at his hoodie pocket, reaching in through the cold, damp fabric to pull out his phone. His hands are freezing cold and pale, stiff with the chill, and he can barely get his phone unlocked, can barely swipe through his contacts. He ignores the voicemails from his mom, from Aizawa, from the school, from his friends, and instead he goes straight to Aizawa's contact, presses the call button.

He lifts the phone to his ear, shutting his eyes and trying not to shake quite so hard as he does. He feels Mouse shift closer to him, kneeling in front of them. She glows brighter, bright enough that Izuku can see the glow even through his eyelids, and Izuku sighs in relief as the warm washes over him. He hears the phone ring once, twice, a third time, and then it clicks, picking up.

"Midoriya?" It's Aizawa's voice, confused and tired and concerned. "Where are you? Nobody knows where you've been, we've been trying to reach you since this morning." Izuku swallows, lets out a shaky laugh. He hears Aizawa moving on the other end of the line.

"M right outside the gate," he says, and he can hear Aizawa breathe in at the sound of Izuku's voice, hoarse and weak. "I can't come in, I've got Mouse and R--and Angel with me," he says. He hears movement, like running, and he knows that Aizawa is on his way.

"You have *who*?" Aizawa asks, but he doesn't wait for an answer. "Are you injured?" Izuku swallows.

"Yeah," he replies, letting the sounds of Aizawa's footsteps fill his mind as he opens his eyes, looking down at Ren where she's still unconscious, her shoulders resting on his outstretched legs. There's a darkening bruise on her temple, where she'd been hit, and her dark, braided hair is damp

from the rain.

“What injuries? I’m on my way,” Aizawa says. Izuku shifts his gaze to look at Mouse, where she has her hands outstretched, fingertips and palms glowing like hot coals.

“Angel’s got... she’s got a head wound, prolly a concussion,” Izuku says, his words starting to slur worse and worse by the moment. “Mouse is... she’s jus’ tired, I think.” He thinks he can hear the footsteps in real life, too, but he doesn’t want to get his hopes up.

“What about *you* , problem child?” Aizawa hisses, and *oh* , Izuku definitely heard that from behind the gate, not just through the phone. Izuku laughs, shakily.

“Gunshot wound,” he says. “In my side. Concussion, too.” He licks his lips, tasting blood. “Throwing up blood.” He doesn’t have it in him to speak in full sentences, but he can tell that Aizawa gets the gist from the way he swears sharply. The phone disconnects a second later, and Aizawa is skidding out from the gate, his eyes wild and his scarf flaring out around him. He freezes when he sees the three of them, beaten and bruised and bloody.

It’s Mouse that moves first, turning and standing up fully, putting herself in between Izuku and Aizawa. She raises her arms out on either side, like she’s trying to block Aizawa from getting to Izuku, and the light inside of her flares even brighter, the air around her rippling with heat. Izuku can’t see her face, but he can hear the fear in her voice when she speaks.

“Are you gonna hurt Izuku?” Mouse asks, her voice loud. Izuku blinks, watching as Aizawa steps forward, his hands up. Mouse glows brighter. “Are you gonna hurt Izuku?” she asks again, shouting. Aizawa stares at her.

“No,” he says, and Izuku knows that he’s telling the truth from the way Mouse’s fire dims slightly and she starts to lower her arms even before Aizawa’s finished speaking. “I would *never* ,” Aizawa says, firmly, and Mouse is moving out of the way just as Aizawa rushes forward. Izuku feels a pair of warm hands on his skin, feeling his neck for his pulse and patting down his sides, but Izuku can’t move, can’t make himself do anything except for draw in breath after painful breath. He can feel the world starting to swirl and fade again, can feel his consciousness start to slip as relief washes over him.

“Stay with me,” Aizawa says, his voice pleading and urgent and loud in Izuku’s ears. “Stay with me, kid, *please* .” Izuku swallows, feeling himself tilt to the side slightly as his eyes start to shut.

“Tired,” he murmurs, quietly. He feels Aizawa’s hands grab his shoulders, feel Aizawa shake him, but it doesn’t help. The last thing Izuku hears as everything fades away is his teacher shouting his name, over and over again.

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When Izuku wakes up, next time, he almost expects to open his eyes to a rainy, dark sidewalk, to pain in his side and an ache in his head and his gut. Instead, he comes to consciousness slowly, with a heavy feeling throughout his whole body. The room he’s in must be brightly lit, because he can see the light shining through his eyelids, making him see red instead of black with his eyes shut, but Izuku doesn’t want to open his eyes. He doesn’t want to wake up and find himself on that street after all, doesn’t want to wake up and find himself in the tower or on the ground outside.

Izuku tries to focus on what he can feel. He’s lying on something soft, something with a fabric covering, and there’s a blanket thrown over him, tucked in carefully at his sides. He can feel a dull aching in his side, a light pain in his temples, and a sharp sensation in his gut, but not much else.

He feels warm, too, not like he had when he'd been drenched with heavy rain, not like when the only thing keeping him warm was the heat that Mouse gave off. Izuku wonders if he's in heaven, the real one and not the quirk.

He opens his eyes to a bright ceiling light, to a view of an IV stand that's dripping something clear into a tube that snakes down and into his arm. Izuku blinks in the light, tipping his head to the side to see his mom, sitting in a chair by his bedside, her head tilted down and resting on her shoulder. There's a thin string of drool running down and onto her baby blue shirt as she snores softly.

"Kid?" Someone says, their voice rough with lack of sleep, and Izuku turns his head the other way to see his teacher, standing up beside a chair between two beds. In the bed on Izuku's other side, he can see Mouse, curled up on her side and facing him. She's fast asleep, her messy curls brushed through and her skin free of soot. She's wearing the same hospital gown that Izuku is, just in a smaller size.

"Hey," Izuku says, smiling slightly as he moves his eyes to look up at Aizawa. His teacher looks like a wreck, with a bruise high on his cheekbone and a bandage on his left shoulder, but he's *here*, wearing sweats and a black tank top. He's here, and he's watching Izuku sleep in a hospital bed, which means that *they made it*. Izuku takes a deep breath, the sensation soothing and soft. *We made it. We did it*, he thinks to himself.

"How are you feeling?" Aizawa asks, taking a few steps towards Izuku and pressing his hand into a button on Izuku's bed, probably to call a nurse. Izuku swallows, his eyes already growing heavy again.

"Sleepy," he murmurs. "Doesn't hurt," he adds, since it really doesn't, all things considered. He hears Aizawa sigh softly above him, feels a warm hand come to rest in his hair.

"Get some rest, Midoriya. We'll still be here when you wake up," Aizawa says, and that's enough for Izuku to sink back into sleep.

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Izuku opens his eyes again, some time later. It's dark in the hospital room, with the pale light of the moon spilling through the window in between his bed and Mouse's, casting a square of light on the tile floor. Izuku blinks away sleep from his eyes, turning his gaze down, to where his legs feel strangely heavy.

Curled up on top of his legs, wrapped around him like an octopus, is Mouse. Her cheek is squished where it rests against Izuku's hip, her mouth slightly open and her breath moving a lock of her dark hair each time she breathes out. Izuku smiles softly, reaching down with the hand that isn't hooked up to the IV, and he carefully places his hand on top of Mouse's head. She's warm, but no warmer than a normal child would be.

Izuku glances around the room. His mom is on a cot, now, sleeping face down with her head turned to the side to face him. She's still sound asleep, but this time, when Izuku looks to the side, Aizawa is, too. He's in his sleeping bag, sitting upright in a hospital chair with his head tilted back and his mouth slightly open. The bruise on his face looks a little more yellow, a little less angry, but not *that* much, so Izuku figures he's been out for at least a day, but not much longer. He turns his head to look up at his IV, but it's too dark and too far away for him to try and read the label. Not that he'd know what it said, anyway.

Izuku kind of wishes one of the adults were awake, so that he could ask about Ren, but he doesn't want to wake them, not when his vision is already growing blurry again, his eyes already drooping

shut. He lets them fall. *I'll try to stay awake longer next time*, he thinks to himself, and he sinks into comfortable blackness once more.

--

The next time Izuku wakes up, it's to a gentle buzz of conversation in voice that might have been trying to keep quiet a few moments ago, but keep rising in volume, bit by bit. Izuku shifts, swallowing and turning to the side slightly, sleep still clinging to him for a moment.

"I think he's waking up!" someone says, excited, and Izuku blinks his eyes open, staring blearily at his IV bag where it sits in the center of his vision. He shifts his head, and he sees his mom standing with Aizawa, Neito, Kacchan, and Todoroki. Beside them, in a wheelchair, sits Ren, her hair down and piled loosely in her lap and a huge smile on her face.

"You're okay," Izuku says, his voice scratchy and dry. He swallows, coughing lightly, and his mom moves quickly, holding a plastic cup of water to his lips. Izuku starts to sit up, but he finds he doesn't have to, and he can see Kacchan wielding the controls for the bed in his hand, his face set into a scowl. Todoroki is watching him with wide eyes, and Neito is smiling, softly, the same expression his mother is wearing, minus the tears building in her eyes. Aizawa's brows are drawn together ever so slightly.

"Yup," Ren says, as Izuku sips at the cool water. "Me and Mouse are totally fine. You're the only one who needed surgery," she says, and Izuku blinks, frowning as his mom pulls the water away and sets the cup at his bedside.

"Surgery?" Izuku asks, and he sees Aizawa and his mom exchange a look.

"You three might want to come back later," Aizawa says, carefully, looking at Neito, Todoroki, and Kacchan with narrowed eyes. "We don't want to overwhelm him."

"They can stay," Izuku says, absently. "Where's Mouse? She's sharing the room with me, right?" Aizawa turns his gaze back to Izuku, nods.

"So you do remember waking up before," Aizawa says. "She's with a quirk specialist right now, although I doubt they'll be able to keep her for long," he says, dryly. "She refused to be put in a separate room from you. Took a lot to convince her to even be in a separate bed." Izuku blinks.

"She's okay, though?" he asks, and Aizawa nods.

"She's fine. Like Yamauchi said, you were the only one with serious injuries." Aizawa glances to Ren, who nods, but it's Inko who speaks next.

"Baby, I'm so sorry," she says, and she carefully, slowly takes Izuku's hand in hers, like she's trying not to startle him. "I should have said something. I should have told them sooner, I--" Izuku frowns, his brows drawing together.

"Y-You told them?" Izuku asks, and his mom nods, slowly.

"Midoriya," Aizawa says. "It was pretty obvious when you showed up with two captives only a teenage vigilante had access to. Your mother just confirmed it." Izuku glances over at him, feeling sharp fear rise in his chest.

"Am I--am I in trouble?" he asks, and he can see the way Aizawa's brows lower, the way his lips press together into a frown.

“No, problem child,” he says. “You’re not in trouble. But you need to stop hiding things from us.” Aizawa sighs, and Izuku can see the exhaustion in his face, in the way his shoulders sag. “We just want to help. We can’t do that if we don’t have all of the pieces,” Aizawa says. Izuku swallows and nods, casting a glance over at Kacchan, Todoroki, and Neito where they’re still standing by the foot of his bed. It isn’t lost on Izuku that if the three of them decided to share what each of them knew, he wouldn’t have any secrets anymore. As he catches Neito’s gaze, though, Neito gives him a sharp shake of the head, a tiny movement Izuku almost misses. *He hasn’t told them*, Izuku realizes, holding back his sigh of relief.

“Okay,” he says, his voice small. He meets Aizawa’s gaze. “I-I’ll try,” he says, and Aizawa gives him a tiny, tired smile.

“Good,” he says, with a soft sigh in his voice. Izuku hears his mom sniffle from his other side, and he turns to look at her, to see her wiping tears from her eyes with the sleeve of her shirt.

“I-I’m so glad you’re okay, Izuku,” she says, sniffing. Her eyes, green and wide like his, are blurry with tears. “They didn’t--they didn’t know if you’d pull through, the infection and the blood loss and--” she cuts herself off, shaking her head. “I’m glad you’re okay, baby.” She gives him a soft smile, a gentle squeeze of his hand. Izuku squeezes her hand back, and he returns the smile.

“I’m glad too,” he says, softly. He thinks he might actually mean it.

Chapter End Notes

content warnings: vomiting, graphic description of injuries, medical stuff

[discord!](#)

thank you thank you for reading!!! btw, this fic has a carrd now, which has links to a chapter summary doc ! [here it is!](#)

hospital

Chapter Summary

last time: izuku, mouse, and ren make the journey to UA. izuku dies a few times. he calls aizawa at the gate, and they're taken to the hospital. the cat is out of the bag.

Chapter Notes

:3c hi gamers

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Izuku leans back against his pillows, sighing and puffing out his cheeks slightly. Aizawa stares at him from the chair beside his bed, an unimpressed look on his face.

“You knew what my answer would be even before you asked, Midoriya,” Aizawa says, cocking one eyebrow up. His hair is tied back in a ponytail, with a few strands falling loosely onto his face, and as he watches Izuku, he reaches up to brush one out of the way. “I’m not going to let you visit Kirishima until the *doctor* says you can, and not a moment sooner.” Izuku frowns, trying his best to use his sad, torture-victim face to his advantage.

“But you said he was awake now,” Izuku says. “And the entire rest of the class got to see him. He’s going to--he’s going to think I hate him,” Izuku says, folding his arms over his chest. He’s had a variation of this argument already at least three times, but Aizawa isn’t budging. Izuku knows the only reason he’s humoring Izuku by explaining himself each time is because both of them are beyond bored in the hospital.

“Yes, but the rest of the class aren’t recovering from a gunshot wound and severe quirk overuse,” Aizawa says, rolling his eyes. “And before you ask, no, you can’t go see Toogata either.” Izuku presses his lips into a thin line.

“How’s he doing?” Izuku asks, instead. Aizawa meets his gaze, breathing out softly.

“As well as can be expected,” Aizawa says. “Nighteye still isn’t awake, and it’s not looking good. Amajiki woke up briefly yesterday, but Toogata wasn’t able to see him.” Aizawa’s dark gaze meets Izuku’s. “You’re not the only one frustrated about being confined to a bed.” Izuku swallows.

“Yeah,” Izuku says, quietly. He casts his gaze down, at the blue blanket that’s draped over him. “They said I might get to start walking around later, if my blood pressure stays up and the fever stays down.” He casts a glance to his side, at the screen that displays his heartbeat and his other vitals. Izuku doesn’t know what the numbers mean, other than his temperature, which is a solid 37.3 Celsius, way lower than it had been the night before, when his temperature had spiked back up. *Just when they were starting to plan my discharge*, Izuku thinks, glumly.

“Yamauchi is doing better,” Aizawa says, as if sensing Izuku’s bad mood. “She’s starting physical therapy tomorrow morning.” Izuku blinks, looking up at his teacher.

“Really?” he asks, and he smiles, slightly. “Do you think she can come visit again, soon?”

“I don’t know,” Aizawa says, “but I’ll ask next time I see her.” He picks his phone up from his lap, squinting at it. “Your mother should be here in about an hour. I’ll drop by her room on the way out.” Izuku nods quickly.

“You know, you guys--you don’t have to watch me all the time,” Izuku says. Aizawa arches an eyebrow at him.

“What, so you can try to sneak into Kirishima’s room the second you’re left alone? Or would it be Nighteye again?” Aizawa asks, his tone thick with sarcasm and annoyance. Izuku feels his cheeks start to burn, because maybe he’d snuck out a couple of times, but it doesn’t mean that he can’t be left alone! He’s dealt with worse pain than this, worse injuries than this, and he’s always survived. *Not like I can tell them I won’t die, though.*

A knock at the door interrupts Izuku and Aizawa’s conversation. Izuku glances up, to where the door is cracked open, like usual, and he watches as it opens to show his mom, a bright smile on her face and one hand on Mouse’s shoulder. Mouse is wearing a big green sweatshirt that’s one of Izuku’s from middle school and a pair of cropped grey leggings that end just below her knee, and she might not be smiling like Inko is, but the bright gleam to her eyes is just as exciting. Izuku blinks, leaning forward slightly.

“Did they find her?” Izuku asks, his words coming out breathy and fast. His mom nods, just as Mouse rocks on her hospital-socked feet and nods, her hair swishing with the movement.

“They found Mouse! They found Mouse!” Mouse says, nodding over and over. “Mouse is real, now.” Izuku feels his own grin widen, stretching his face, and he thinks that he can see a hint of a smile on Aizawa’s face, too.

“Her name is Shizuko Maruyama,” Inko says, looking down at her with a soft expression on her face. “And she’s turning eight next month.” Izuku blinks.

“Whoa, Mouse, you’re younger than I thought!” he says, and Mouse blinks up at him, her lips pressing into her own version of a smile, small and crooked but still there.

“Mouse is way cool,” Mouse says, nodding. “The ray guy said so,” she says, and Izuku nods.

“He’s right, you know,” Izuku says to her. “You’re *way* cool.” He leans back into his pillows, waving a hand. “You don’t have just--to just stand in the door, you know,” he says, his eyes meeting his mom’s briefly. Her cheeks dimple with her smile, and she lifts the hand from Mouse’s shoulder. Mouse walks quickly, neatly over to Izuku and climbs up onto the foot of his bed, sitting criss-crossed right by his feet where they make little mountains in the blanket.

“You’re doing okay,” Mouse says, tipping her head to the side. Izuku nods.

“I’m doing good,” he answers. “Should I keep calling you Mouse, or do you want me to call you Shizuko?” Mouse blinks, staring at him, and Izuku can see his mom give him a look, his lips pressing together.

“I’m Mouse,” Mouse says, sounding confused. Izuku swallows, glancing back at his mom. She gives a little shake of her head.

“O-Okay,” Izuku says, biting at his lower lip. “You’re Mouse.” Izuku glances over to Aizawa. “Are you gonna go, now? You have class today, don’t you?” Aizawa stares back at him.

“Only morning classes, and I already taught those.” Aizawa’s eyes narrow slightly. “You should know that, though. Are you feeling okay?” Izuku blinks.

“I-I’m fine,” Izuku says. “But you have training with Shinsou, right?” He watches as Aizawa nods, slowly. Izuku swallows, chewing on his lower lip. He hasn’t seen Shinsou since before the rescue mission, since before the raid, and it’s not like he *should* be nervous about it, not like he has a reason to be, but he still is.

He knows he’s done something to upset Shinsou, and Izuku can’t think of anything else that he *could* have done while in the hospital other than take Aizawa away from Shinsou. Aizawa’s insisted more than a few times that Izuku isn’t keeping him from work, from UA or from hero work, but Izuku knows that’s not true. It may have only been three days since he stumbled toward the gate of UA, since he called Aizawa on his phone and asked for help, but Izuku knows that in those three days, Aizawa’s been here more than he hasn’t.

“Normally, yes,” Aizawa says, and Izuku tenses. He knows that Aizawa sees it, because Aizawa stops, letting out a long, low sigh. “Look, Midoriya--”

“You shouldn’t ignore him just because I’m in the hospital,” Izuku says, leaning forward, sitting up in his bed. He feels a tug of pain from his stitches in his side, but he keeps moving. “It’s--it’s not fair to him, he didn’t do anything wrong, and--”

“Midoriya.” Izuku blinks, looking up. Standing in the door to his hospital room is Shinsou, wearing his UA uniform with a black hoodie over the top, the zipper pulled halfway up. His eyes are half lidded, his mouth angled down in something close to a frown.

“S-Shinsou,” Izuku says. “You--you’re here.” He stares at Shinsou, at his violet hair illuminated by the bright hospital lights. He tilts his head to the side and back slightly, his lips curving up in a lazy smirk.

“Yeah,” he says. “I am. How’s the gunshot wound doing?” Shinsou asks, taking a few steps forward, into the room. From the foot of the bed, Mouse turns her head to look at him, tipping her head to the side.

“It’s--it’s good now,” Izuku says. He doesn’t miss the narrowed eyes from Aizawa, the press of his lips together. “How--how are you?”

“I’m not the one who got shot,” Shinsou says, his gaze turning down at Mouse. “This the kid you nearly died for?” Izuku swallows, nodding.

“Yeah, she--she is,” Izuku says. He glances to Aizawa. “I didn’t think that you’d--that you’d been told the story.” Aizawa blinks at him, slowly.

“He knows that you slipped out during the raid on the Shie Hassaikai and decided to play vigilante,” Aizawa says, carefully. “And that you fought a criminal to save a victim of kidnapping.” Izuku blinks, nodding. It’s the same story that Aizawa had told some of the class, had told Todoroki and Neito and Kacchan. He’d told the rest of the class that Izuku had been attacked by a villain, that Mouse was rescued in another, separate operation, that she’d just bonded with Izuku in the hospital. Izuku doesn’t find the story particularly believable, himself, but he supposes it’s not like they could have just told everyone the truth and expected that to go well.

“Why are you phrasing it like that?” Shinsou asks, narrowing his eyes. “Trying to get your story straight?” he asks, arching an eyebrow and giving Aizawa something that might be a dirty look. Izuku swallows.

“Izuku saved me,” Mouse says, loudly. She frowns, staring at Shinsou. “He never tells fake stories.” Izuku blinks, watching as Shinsou slides his gaze over to look at her. Izuku wonders if she knows she’s lying, or if she didn’t understand what Aizawa said. Izuku’s pretty sure that, despite how she talks, that she’s pretty smart, but he wouldn’t have expected her to even know that lying was an *option*.

“He saved you, huh?” Shinsou asks, sighing through his nose. He slides his hands into the pockets of his hoodie, glancing over to Izuku. “Certainly explains why you were so concerned about me that night. You knew me,” Shinsou says, and Izuku blinks, confused. It takes him a few moments to remember that foggy, cool evening, when Shinsou was tucked in the forest, bleeding and alone on his birthday. Izuku swallows, but it’s Aizawa who speaks.

“You met him as Ace?” Aizawa asks, his eyes narrowing slightly. Shinsou doesn’t react.

“Yeah, saw him while I was out for a walk,” he says, easily. “Thought he seemed awfully familiar.” Shinsou turns back to look at Izuku. “Pretty smart of you to dye your hair, by the way.”

“T-Thanks,” Izuku says, absently. On the foot of the bed, Mouse shifts, seeming uncomfortable with the tension in the room. Izuku feels her start to heat up, but the glow that might give her away in a dark room isn’t bright enough to be visible yet, not with the lights all on and the curtains pulled open to let in the light from outside.

“Do they know when you can go back to training?” Shinsou asks. “The stupid second years won’t leave me alone without you there to distract them.” He rolls his eyes, but Izuku feels a stab of cold dread in his chest. He can see his heart rate picking up from the numbers on the monitor beside him, and he just prays that neither Aizawa nor Shinsou are paying it any attention. *The second years*, he thinks. *That includes Haruta*.

“They said--they said that, uh, with quirk healing and--and with rehab, that I should be back to normal in a couple of--a couple of months,” Izuku says. Beside him, his mom sighs. Izuku’d almost forgotten she was there.

“That’s *if* you listen to your doctors,” she says, her voice gentle but firm. “Which includes resting when you’re supposed to.” Izuku glances over to Aizawa, who nods.

“We’re not going to rush anything,” Aizawa says, a light warning in his tone. “But I don’t see any reason why he can’t watch training once he’s cleared to go back to non-physical classes,” he says, his eyes moving between Shinsou and Izuku. “*Just* watching, though.” Shinsou nods, seeming to accept it.

“Pretty lucky, all things considered,” Shinsou says, his eyes clinging to Izuku, looking a little too sharply for Izuku to feel comfortable. Izuku wonders if there’s something else coming, if Shinsou’s going to continue, but he doesn’t, instead walking over to the pair of chairs on the other side of the room, dragging one over. As he does, Aizawa stands.

“Don’t bother,” Aizawa says, sighing. “I’m supposed to go help with Eri,” he says, quietly. Izuku blinks.

“Is she--is she getting more tests run?” he asks. “I want to meet her.” Izuku’s been trying to convince Aizawa that he should meet Eri ever since he’d first heard her name mentioned. So far, all he’s managed to get out of Aizawa is that she was rescued from the Shie Hassaikai and that she’s got a dangerous quirk. Izuku doesn’t know the details, but he can tell the story is awfully similar to Mouse’s and he can’t help it--he wants to help her, too.

“You aren’t supposed to be walking without supervision of a medical professional,” Aizawa says, sighing as he stands up from his chair. “And Eri is in an isolation unit. You’re not going to meet her, not yet,” he says, starting to walk out of the room. Izuku swallows.

“When will she be out of isolation?” he asks. Aizawa pauses, his back to Izuku.

“I don’t know,” he says, quietly, and Izuku can hear the pain in his voice. It stops Izuku from asking more questions, stops him from badgering Aizawa. He watches his teacher walk out of the hospital room.

Shinsou sighs, shrugging his shoulders and plopping down into the chair Aizawa had just stood up from. He folds one leg up, resting the outside of his ankle on his knee, and he leans forward. Izuku turns to him curiously.

“Don’t you--don’t you have training right now?” Izuku asks. Shinsou raises an eyebrow.

“I *just* told you how annoying the second years are being,” Shinsou says, slowly, like Izuku’s dumb. “And you heard Aizawa. He’s not training me right now.” Izuku swallows. He glances up to his mother, but she’s settled down into her chair, her phone in her lap. Either she’s not listening, or she’s being polite and pretending not to.

“Are you--are you mad at me?” Izuku asks, hating the way his voice breaks slightly. “I mean, I’m--I’m keeping Aizawa from training with you.” He swallows down the lump in his throat as he watches Shinsou tip his head to the side, brows furrowing as he frowns.

“No,” Shinsou says, like it’s obvious. “I’m not mad at you, Midoriya.” He pauses for a moment, before turning his gaze to the side. “It’s because I haven’t visited yet,” he says, and it’s not a question. Izuku nods, anyway.

“Y-Yeah,” he says, quietly. “You didn’t--you didn’t have to, I-I don’t mean that you--” Izuku starts to say, his voice rising, but Shinsou cuts him off.

“It’s because I was worried,” Shinsou says, sighing. “I didn’t want to come until they knew you’d be okay.” He meets Izuku’s eyes, the edges of his lips quirking up into a weak smile. “Pretty pathetic, right?” Izuku blinks, then shakes his head.

“N-No, it’s...” Izuku swallows. “It makes sense.” Shinsou sighs, looking down at his lap for just a moment. After a moment’s pause, the soft sounds of the hospital filling the gap in the conversation, he looks up. His gaze moves to Mouse, and Izuku follows the path of his eyes. While Izuku was talking, she must have curled up at the end of the bed, and her eyes have slipped shut. Her chest rises and falls, slow and even.

“She must have been tired,” Shinsou says, his voice a whisper. Izuku nods.

“Yeah,” he says, reaching a hand down to rest it gently on top of her head. Her dark curls are clean, now, although according to his mom and the nurses, it’s a struggle to keep the soot out of it. Izuku glances back up at Shinsou, a smile tugging up on his lips.

“So how’s class?” he asks, and Shinsou arches an eyebrow, sighing and leaning back in the seat.

“Terrible. Mic keeps filling in for Aizawa, and it’s the worst thing to ever happen,” he says, an exaggerated groan in his voice. “Voice hero, at eight a.m.? Awful,” he says, and his sigh doesn’t hide the slight smile to his lips. Izuku smiles back at him, letting Shinsou pull him into a conversation about class and training and everything that’s normal to Izuku, everything that he’s been missing.

When Izuku is finally deemed well enough for the police to question him, it's storming outside. Izuku's sitting on the edge of his hospital bed, his legs dangling over the edge, grippy hospital socks barely brushing against the tile floor as he kicks his legs. Izuku knows he should be grateful-his fever is gone, his blood pressure back up, and a bunch of fancy medical terms he needs to look up later are back within normal range. The hospital staff are impressed, are shocked that he's been healing so fast. Izuku isn't surprised, isn't grateful.

Mostly, he's just bored. When he'd first been here, when he'd been sleeping all the time, it was easy to pass the time. Now that he's been here six days, almost a *week*, now that he's healed to the point where he can walk around the hospital by himself, to the point where he really, really does not see the point in keeping him here, it just sucks. They've said that it's so he can keep getting quirk healing treatments, so that they can monitor his wound, but he doesn't see why he can't do that at UA. It's not like they don't have medical staff there, not like they don't have someone with a healing quirk.

So, Izuku's already kind of in a bad mood when Tsukauchi walks into his room, followed close behind by Aizawa and Nezu. Aizawa's wearing his costume, and judging by the white chalk dust on the front of his shirt, he's just come from school. Nezu and Tsukauchi are both in suits, of course. Izuku thinks he's tired of seeing people in suits. At least now, he's allowed to wear his own clothes, a long sleeved shirt and a pair of shorts, at least until his next treatment session. The doctor's healing quirk dehydrates him, or something, so he has to get hooked back up to an IV, and it leaves him groggy and weak for a few hours, but Izuku doesn't mind if it means he'll get to go back to class sooner.

"Hello, Midoriya," Nezu says, walking right up to the bed. He sits in the chair that Aizawa or Inko usually sit in, the one between Izuku's bed and Mouse's currently empty one. Aizawa and Tsukauchi exchange a glance behind Nezu, before each pulling up a chair from the other side of the room, setting them beside Nezu and each taking their seats.

"Hi," Izuku says, shifting so that he's facing them instead of the door. Detective Tsukauchi reaches into the pocket of the coat he's wearing over his suit, pulling out his notebook. Izuku resists the urge to groan.

"I'm sorry to bother you," Tsukauchi says, an apologetic smile on his face. "But we really need to get some information regarding this case. It's a complicated situation, one the police need to be aware of." Izuku sighs, clenching his teeth together.

"The police, or UA?" he asks, his eyes sliding over to Nezu. The principal doesn't react, still smiling with his paws folded in front of him.

"Both!" Nezu answers, cheerfully. "Because this is clearly a sensitive situation, and Aizawa is already aware, we've decided to keep outside involvement to a minimum. Only Tsukauchi and the chief of police for Musutafu will be 'in the loop,' so to speak." He nods to himself. "UA is one of the most secure institutions in the country, so--"

"With all due respect," Izuku says, his voice shaking slightly but still firm. "I've been--I've been sneaking out of your *secure institution* without you knowing to meet up with villains since we moved into the dorms," he says, narrowing his eyes at Nezu. "I don't know if I want--if I want UA knowing everything." Nezu doesn't even blink.

"Yes, you have," Nezu says. "And as far as we're aware, that in and of itself explains all of our security breaches, you see." He tips his head to the side slightly. "I'm just trying to piece together

why you'd give away the location of the summer camp to the Gekkeiju if you were planning on betraying them. It seems like a poor strategy, really." Nezu shrugs, like he's asking a friend about tea. Izuku blinks.

"I--that wasn't me," Izuku says, frowning. He watches Nezu glance to Tsukauchi.

"If you will," Nezu prompts. Tsukauchi nods, his lips pursed together.

"Midoriya, did you reveal the location of the summer camp to anyone? This would include even people who aren't necessarily affiliated with villain organizations. Anyone at all," Tsukauchi says. Izuku meets his gaze with steady eyes.

"No," he says. "I didn't." Izuku watches Tsukauchi nod.

"He's telling the truth," he says, his eyes sliding over to Nezu. "He hasn't lied once this whole conversation, for the record." Nezu smiles wider.

"Well, that just makes things even more interesting!" he says, clapping his paws together. "So then," Nezu says, tipping his head slightly as he looks at Izuku. "Tell us your story, Midoriya. I'm sure it's an interesting one." Izuku meets his gaze, and he doesn't look away, even though he can feel a shiver threatening to wash over him, to give away his nerves. *I'm not going to let them treat me like a villain.*

"I learned about my quirk when I was fourteen," Izuku says. He sees Aizawa's eyes widen, ever so slightly, sees Tsukauchi start furiously scribbling down on his notepad. "I was attacked by a sludge villain, the same one that attacked Kacchan later on." Izuku takes a deep breath. "I would have died. My quirk showed me what would have happened, if I had walked my normal path, if I hadn't fought back. So I walked a different way, and I fought." Izuku fidgets with the cuticles on his hands. He doesn't want to break down the whole story bit by bit, but he knows he has to give them something. Tsukauchi nods encouragingly.

"And what is your quirk, exactly?" he prompts. Izuku swallows. This is the part of the story that'll be the most difficult for him to say, the hardest for him to work around. *It certainly helps that rewinding back after something technically lets you see the future,* he thinks to himself.

"It doesn't--it doesn't have an official name," Izuku says. "I've been calling it Mulligan, as Ace, anyway." He glances down at his lap for a moment, before forcing himself to look back up. "It lets me see the future, but only in certain circumstances."

"Which are?" Nezu prompts. Izuku doesn't blink.

"I have to be in a situation where--where depending on how I do things, I could die," Izuku says. It's technically true--if Izuku can't die, he can't reset. If Izuku doesn't reset, he doesn't know the future. He holds his breath for a second, but Tsukauchi doesn't stop writing, so Izuku assumes that everything's pinged as true. He breathes out, trying not to make it loud or shaky enough to give himself away.

"Mortal danger," Aizawa says, his voice low. Izuku glances over at him. "You told me that once," Aizawa continues, "as Ace." Izuku nods, still looking at his teacher.

"Y-Yeah, um, I did," Izuku says. He bites at his lower lip, just for a second. "That's the next thing, I guess. I'm, uh, Ace."

"Oh, we know that one already," Nezu says, a chuckle in his voice. "You can relax, you know," he says, still smiling. "You're so tense. We're just here to help you, really." Nezu stares at Izuku, but

Izuku narrows his eyes slightly, his gaze sliding over to Tsukauchi. The detective looks up at him, his gaze softening slightly.

“Nezu’s telling the truth, Midoriya,” Tsukauchi says. “I know you don’t have any reason to believe me, but we’re not here to get you in trouble.” He smiles sadly, glancing down at his notes. “We’re trying to get you *out* of trouble.”

Izuku swallows. “R-Right,” he says, taking a moment to press his eyes shut, just long enough to steady himself. “Okay,” he says, like if he says it again, he’ll believe it.

“I have a question,” Aizawa asks. Izuku looks over to him. “If you’re Ace, then who was at the raid on the Shie Hassaikai?” Izuku blinks.

“Um,” Izuku says. “I kind of... asked for help with that?” he says, giving Aizawa a nervous smile. Aizawa narrows his eyes.

“From who?” Aizawa asks. Izuku swallows.

“Uh, I needed--I needed an alibi,” he says, looking between Aizawa and Tsukauchi, at the wall at the far end of the room. “For the Gekkeiju, since otherwise--otherwise they’d know it was me.” He takes a shaky breath. “So I kind of--I kind of convinced Toga and Twice to help you guys?”

“You *what*,” Aizawa says, his eyes widening, then narrowing. “Please tell me he’s lying,” he says, not even looking at Tsukauchi. Tsukauchi sighs.

“He isn’t,” Tsukauchi says. Aizawa sighs, reaching up to pinch the bridge of his nose. Nezu sighs, shaking his head.

“Oh, Aizawa, we knew it had to be something along those lines,” Nezu says, clicking his tongue. “Don’t act so surprised.” He glances over to Izuku. “What were they planning to do, before you spoke with them?” Izuku blinks.

“Um, they were going to work with the Shie Hassaikai, I-I think,” Izuku says. Nezu nods.

“Midoriya, has anyone told you what role, exactly, Twice and the false Ace played in the raid?” Nezu asks. Izuku blinks, shaking his head. Nezu leans forward slightly. “One of Twice’s clones saved Nighteye’s life, and Toga as Ace was instrumental in the rescue of young Eri,” he says. Izuku feels his eyes widen.

“They--they really did that?” Izuku asks. Nezu nods, leaning back.

“Now, I think it was more out of a desire to hurt the yakuza rather than to help you or UA,” Nezu says, shrugging, “but the result is rather nice, either way. Don’t you agree?” Nezu says, smiling at Izuku. Izuku stares back at him, his eyes wide.

“So they--they helped,” Izuku says, letting out a slow breath and looking down at his lap. “They really helped.”

“What did you do, exactly, to convince them to do that?” Aizawa asks, his voice carefully controlled.

“I, um, I told them that--that the Gekkeiju don’t like the Shie Hassaikai, so if they worked with UA, they might get on the Gekkeiju’s good side again,” Izuku says. He swallows. “I also gave--I gave Toga some of my blood.” He hears Aizawa sigh, but it’s Tsukauchi who asks the next question.

“Why do the Gekkeiju dislike the Shie Hassaikai?” he asks. When Izuku looks up at him, his brow is furrowed slightly, and he’s resting the tip of his pen on his notepad.

“They, um, they’re collecting certain quirks,” Izuku says. “So if the--if the Shie Hassaikai are destroying quirks, that kind of stops them from doing what they want,” he explains. Tsukauchi nods.

“That’s consistent with the intel we’ve received from you previously, and now from Yamauchi,” Tsukauchi says. He taps his pen against the paper, and when no other questions seem forthcoming, Izuku takes a deep breath.

“I wasn’t--I wasn’t working with the Gekkeiju until after they kidnapped me,” he says. He looks at his lap. “When they--when they took me, they were gonna kill me. I had to make a deal,” he says, his voice growing smaller and smaller. His chest feels tight, all of a sudden.

“What was the deal?” Tsukauchi prompts, his voice soft. Izuku shakes his head.

“I-I had to--I had to join them, they--they wanted me to--to work for them,” he says. He squeezes his eyes shut for a moment, but he has to open them again, because when he’s thinking about the Gekkeiju and his deal and the tower, all he can think about is cigarette smoke and a golden eye behind dark glasses. He sees Tsukauchi and Aizawa exchange a glance.

“We’re taking a break,” Aizawa says, his brows furrowed as he watches Izuku. “You’re not getting discharged until tomorrow afternoon at the earliest, so we can come back.” Izuku shakes his head, even though he can hear the way his breathing has picked up.

“I can keep--I can keep going,” he says. “I’ve been through worse.”

“That doesn’t mean you should push yourself,” Tsukauchi says, his voice gentle. “We meant it when we said we were here to help you, Midoriya.” Izuku swallows, looking between Tsukauchi, Aizawa, and Nezu, feeling like he’s going to start climbing the walls, like he should be pacing or running or *something*.

“We could come back to this subject,” Nezu says, his voice light. “I don’t know about the two of you, but I have a few more questions that don’t involve your captivity.” Izuku swallows, nods.

“That--that would be good,” he says, and it hurts to admit. Nezu nods, his smile widening slightly.

“Since you weren’t the one to tell the villains about the location of the summer camp,” Nezu asks, tipping his head to the side, “do you know who was?” Izuku stares at him.

“I do,” he says, quietly. “But I can’t tell you.” He feels like his chest is squeezing, again, as Nezu blinks.

“Why not?” he asks. Izuku breathes out, slowly, to try and calm himself.

“Because if--if you suddenly found out, they’d know I was--that I was the leak,” Izuku says. “And the--the person. They’d be tortured,” Izuku says, swallows. “If not worse.”

Tsukauchi’s brows knit together. “Midoriya, have you...” he doesn’t finish the sentence. *He probably already knows the answer*, Izuku thinks. *He’s surely seen my medical file, seen the record of the wounds on my back.*

Izuku finds that he can’t answer in words, can’t make himself tell them, but what he *can* do is roll up the sleeve on his left arm. He can hear Tsukauchi’s sharp intake of breath when Izuku shows

the heavily scarred skin above his bicep, the cuts and the two burns, scarred bright red. Aizawa's seen them before, but Izuku still sees his gaze catch on the burns, catch on the self harm scars.

"I'm sorry to ask," Tsukauchi says. "But did they... did they use any other methods?" Izuku swallows, nods. Beside Tsukauchi, Aizawa speaks.

"They broke his wrist," he says, his voice suddenly rough. "That was them, wasn't it." It isn't a question, but Izuku nods anyways.

"Fury," he says, quietly. He swallows. "Fury's the one--he's the one who tortures us," he says. He tips his head back, staring at the ceiling with watery eyes. "Can I... can I take that break now?" he asks, hating the way that his voice shakes, the way that his chest is constricting painfully. *Why am I upset over this? It's over. It already happened. Why am I so weak now?*

"Of course," Tsukauchi says, his voice quiet. Izuku hears the sound of chairs scooting back, scraping on the ground. He draws in a few ragged breaths.

"Midoriya," Aizawa says, his voice hesitant. Izuku tips his head down to see his teacher standing, just in front of his chair. Tsukauchi and Nezu are already walking out of the room, but Izuku can see them casting glances back at the two of them.

"Stay," Izuku says, suddenly. His voice is choked up, but Aizawa must understand him, because he sits back down right away. "I don't--I can't be alone, not--not right now, I--"

"It's okay," Aizawa says, cutting off Izuku's panicked rambling. "I'm not going anywhere," he says with a soft sigh. His eyes look heavy with exhaustion. "Lie down and breathe, problem child. I'll be right here."

Izuku nods shakily, picking his legs up from where they dangle over the side of the bed and curling up on the hospital bed. As he lays there and cries, as he tries not to think about what he's already been through, what's surely in store for him when he goes back to the Gekkeiju, after all this, Aizawa sits patiently, breathing in and out slowly, loudly enough that Izuku can copy it. Izuku matches his breathing to Aizawa's slowly and not without difficulty, but after a few minutes, he slips into a gentle, light sleep.

Chapter End Notes

content warning: medical stuff, panic attacks, mentions of torture and self harm

[discord!](#)

i hope you enjoyed!!!! this is the last chapter that's entirely in the hospital, so for those of you looking forward to the ~action~, that's coming soon dw!!!

dorm sweet dorm

Chapter Summary

last time: izuku learns some of the conditions of various ppl while in the hospital and gets questioned by nezu, tsukauchi, and aizawa

Chapter Notes

hi guys im so sorry for missing yesterday!!! i was super behind on schoolwork :) but i think i should be caught up enough for now!! im sorry i keep missing days ugh dfjghdkfg also i feel like this chapter is boring but we're getting to the next arc soon!!! anyway i hope u enjoy, im planning on doing a non-canon oneshot soon too so stay tuned!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Izuku steps back into his hospital room, rubbing one hand over the bandage holding a cotton pad to the wound on his arm leftover from the IV. The skin there is irritated slightly, flushed slightly red. The nurse had told Izuku that it was probably just from the infusion but that he should get help if it got any worse. Izuku should probably stop picking at it if he doesn't want to have to do that.

Izuku stops in the doorway to his room, blinking. Nezu, Aizawa, and Tsukauchi, in that order, are sitting in a row of chairs all facing Izuku's bed. The three of them are turned to look at him, and the three sets of eyes on him make Izuku swallow nervously, his mouth suddenly dry.

"Midoriya," Nezu says, delight in his voice. "I was starting to wonder if you might have been discharged and forgot to tell us!" He leans forward, pressing his paws together. "It's good to see you." Izuku swallows, walking from where he's standing at the doorway over towards his bed.

"G-Good to see you too," Izuku says, his voice slightly shaky. He would stand awkwardly in the doorway if he wasn't feeling a little weak from the treatment. It's supposed to be his last one before he's discharged, and then Recovery Girl will take over. The doctors had been worried about his stamina, or something, been worried about how Recovery Girl's quirk would interact with the side effects of his own quirk.

"I said he'd be back," Aizawa says, sighing and crossing his arms over his chest.

"How long--how long have you guys been waiting here?" Izuku asks, sitting down on the edge of the bed. Aizawa sighs.

"Only a few minutes," he replies. "We've just got a few more questions to ask you, and then we'll let you go." His gaze softens slightly. "I heard from your mom that you're getting discharged today." Izuku nods, folding his hands over each other in his lap to stop him from picking at the bandage on his arm.

"H-Hopefully," Izuku says. "They're just waiting on--on my last lab results," he says. Tsukauchi

nods, lifting his pen from where it'd been resting on his notebook.

"I mostly want to clear up some confusion we've had," Tsukauchi says, tapping his pen against the paper. "If you weren't working with the Gekkeiju initially, what prompted you to become Ace?" Tsukauchi pauses for a moment, his eyes moving to the side like he's thinking of what to say. "I'm sure you're aware that vigilantism is illegal, and clearly you'd planned to become a hero through legal means, so why risk that?" Izuku blinks. *This is an easy question*, he thinks to himself.

"Why wait?" Izuku asks, simply. "I didn't--I don't think I ever really thought I'd get into UA until I actually got that acceptance letter," he says, looking down at his lap, at the rough, dry skin of his hands. "I just--I've always wanted to be a hero. I'd just found out that I had this--this amazing quirk, this power that I never thought I'd get. It felt like... it felt like the right thing to do." Izuku lets out a slow breath. "I've--I've saved a lot of people, you know." He looks up at Tsukauchi. "I know that doesn't make it any less illegal, but I don't regret it. I just want to help people, and now that I've started, I'm not going to suddenly stop and wait for when it's allowed." Tsukauchi blinks, but it's Nezu who speaks.

"I don't see any reason to remove a successful young hero from the streets," he says, shrugging his shoulders. Izuku blinks, but Nezu keeps talking. "After all, you have a provisional license, hmm? I personally don't think the exact chronology of when you started hero work and when you got the license matters, especially considering the... extenuating circumstances." Nezu grins, his little black eyes shining. Izuku opens his mouth just a bit, stares at Nezu for a moment.

"You said--you said 'hero,'" Izuku says. "But I'm--"

"Oh, you're a hero, Midoriya," Nezu says, leaning forward. "What else would you call a licensed individual who uses his quirk to save others from criminals and villains?" Nezu glances over at Aizawa. "Wouldn't you agree, Aizawa?" Aizawa sighs.

"I'd wondered why you were so insistent on getting your provisional license," Aizawa says. "It makes a lot more sense now." His eyes, narrowed and dark, glance over Izuku's face. "I still think what you did was reckless and borderline suicidal, though," he adds. Izuku nods, swallowing.

"In any case," Tsukauchi says, smiling, "nobody's going to be arresting you for vigilantism or anything like that." He chuckles, and Izuku lets out a soft, relieved breath.

"So I can--I can keep being Ace?" he asks, his voice high pitched with hope. Izuku sees Tsukauchi and Aizawa exchange a glance.

"That's the other thing I need to ask about," Tsukauchi says, his eyes dragging back over to Izuku. "We would like to start working on withdrawing you from your position within the Gekkeiju," he says. "It's incredibly dangerous, and even veteran pros wouldn't be asked to take on a mission of this difficulty. We--"

"I'm not doing that," Izuku says quickly, his harsh voice cutting Tsukauchi off. "I can't--I can't just stop. There are other people I need to save, and the Gekkeiju is still--they're still trying to kidnap *children*. I can't be responsible for that continuing." Izuku watches Aizawa's eyes narrow before the man speaks.

"You wouldn't be responsible for anything," Aizawa says. "That's not how this works. You've already rescued two captives. Your position there has likely been compromised as is." He stares Izuku down, his lips pressed into a thin line. "You need to stop before you end up in a body bag instead of in the hospital."

“My position,” Izuku says, wetting his lips with the tip of his tongue. “I don’t think it’s compromised,” he says. He watches Tsukauchi’s brows furrow, watches Nezu tip his head to the side and lean forward. His whiskers twitch slightly as he starts to speak.

“Why wouldn’t it be?” Nezu asks, lacing his paws together in front of him. “From the accounts given to us by Mouse and Yamauchi, you used knives to subdue the Gekkeiju members who got in your way, and the escape plan that we were debriefed on would not have been possible for Yamauchi to execute without at least one external operative.” Nezu seems to catch onto Izuku’s confusion, and he pauses for a moment. “Midoriya, there was simply no way someone didn’t break into the compound.”

“I-I had an alibi,” Izuku says, weakly. The Gekkeiju can’t know about what he did. The consequences would be far too great.

“You had an alibi, yes,” Nezu says, sighing. “But the Gekkeiju is certainly well aware of the possibility that you had someone use their quirk to fabricate that alibi.” Nezu shakes his head and sighs as he leans back in his chair. “You simply have no choice but to end your time with their organization, I’m afraid.” Izuku blinks, narrowing his eyes slightly.

“That’s not--it’s not the only way,” he says, the idea starting to crystalize in his mind. “If UA or the police--if one of you made an announcement, said that a pro rescued them, it would help my alibi,” Izuku says, swallowing. “They still would suspect me of--of leaking the tower location, but they wouldn’t--they wouldn’t think I actually did the breaking out part myself,” he says. He watches Aizawa sigh, his eyes narrowing slightly at the same time that Tsukauchi reaches up to press his hand to his temple.

“That’s certainly an idea,” Tsukauchi says, his brows furrowing. “You must understand that we can’t send you back there, right? You’re only sixteen, Midoriya.”

“You’re not *sending* me anywhere,” Izuku says, his voice firm. “I’m going because I want to.” He swallows. “You know I’m telling the truth. I don’t mind what they do to me, what happens to me, if it means I can save the others I want to save.” Tsukauchi sighs, looking down at his notebook.

“Who is it that’s that important to you?” Tsukauchi asks, and Izuku sees Aizawa’s eyes slide over to Tsukauchi, to watch what he’s writing on the notepad. Izuku takes a deep, steadying breath.

“The traitor,” Izuku says. “And a member of the Gekkeiju. She goes by Leadfoot, and she--she was willing to die to help me escape, back when they kidnapped me.” Izuku meets Tsukauchi’s gaze when the detective looks up at him, startled. “She’s being tortured, too.”

“Wait,” Aizawa says, his voice hard. “You want to rescue *Leadfoot* .” Aizawa sighs, leaning forward and resting his head in his hands. “I thought that, after I found out that you were the same insanely suicidal vigilante I’d been working with for months and that you *also* have a quirk that *encourages* you to be insanely suicidal, that I was done with hearing things that made me want to tear my hair out.” Aizawa breathes out, the sigh so deep that it’s almost a groan. Izuku swallows.

“She’s--she’s not what you think she is,” Izuku says. “I don’t think that she’s--that she’s *innocent* , it’s just...” Izuku swallows, squeezing his hands together. “She was willing to do a lot to save Ren, willing to do a lot to save *me* ,” Izuku says, squeezing his eyes shut for a moment.

“You think you owe her,” Aizawa says, his voice sharp and low. Izuku opens his eyes, looks up to see Aizawa’s brows drawn and his face dark.

“No,” Izuku says, his voice soft and quiet. “I’m not doing this because I think I owe her or because

I think--because I think I have to.” He meets Aizawa’s eyes. “I do it because I want to. I want to save as many people as I can before I can’t anymore.” Izuku watches Aizawa’s brows twitch, watches his lips part slightly.

“Before you can’t anymore?” Aizawa asks, his voice not much about a whisper. Izuku pauses, he swallows, his throat thick.

“Everybody dies, someday,” Izuku says. Izuku’s still making eye contact with Aizawa when Tsukauchi speaks.

“Midoriya, you have to understand that we can’t send you back into a dangerous criminal organization just because you want us to,” Tsukauchi says, his voice slow and careful. Izuku shuts his eyes for a moment, breathing in and out slowly.

“I-I’m going to go,” Izuku says, opening his eyes. He looks between Tsukauchi and Aizawa. “Whether you let me or not.”

“Midoriya,” Nezu says, suddenly. He’s still smiling. “Why don’t we make a deal?” Izuku blinks, and Aizawa’s head whips around to look at him.

“You are not going to make a deal to let a *child* --” Aizawa starts, but Nezu raises a paw, cuts him off.

“A child who has, thus far, proved able to avoid our security measures and will be in far more danger if he continues to operate outside of our support?” Nezu gives Aizawa a look out of the side of his eyes. “I think that it’d be far safer to be able to monitor and assist him, personally.” Izuku watches Aizawa shut his eyes for a moment, then lean back in his chair, staring up at the ceiling.

“I don’t like this,” Aizawa says, leaning forward again. Izuku swallows. Tsukauchi clears his throat, tapping his pen on the notepad.

“I think it may be better to save this conversation for later,” Tsukauchi says, shifting in his chair. Izuku looks over to the man, giving a look that he hopes conveys gratefulness. Tsukauchi meets his eyes with a frown on his lips, his brows pulled together ever so slightly. Aizawa sighs.

“You’re right,” he says, scrubbing a hand over the front of his face. He drops his hands into his lap, staring down at them for a moment before he looks back up at Izuku. Izuku feels, vaguely, like he’s in trouble, like he’s at the principal’s office in middle school getting chewed out for being too smart, for being too enthusiastic or loud in class when the other kids, the quirked kids should have been the ones to answer the questions.

Izuku looks down at his lap for a moment, looks at the scar on the edge of his thumb. He doesn’t remember getting it, doesn’t even know when it happened, only that it wasn’t there before he rescued Mouse and Ren, before he raided the tower. It’s a thin, silver scar, and he knows that it’s nothing compared to the scar from where he was shot, nothing compared to the scars on his back, but it’s something that’s easy for him to look at, something that’s hard to miss. It curls from the outside edge of his thumbnail down and around the side of his thumb to the crease where his knuckle bends, just below the pad of his thumb. Izuku traces it with the nail of his other thumb, digging into the silver-white scar. It seems wrong, that it’s healed so fast. Izuku knows how scars work on his body, that they go red before they go pale like this. It’s strange.

“Midoriya?” Aizawa says, and Izuku jerks his head up from where he’d been staring at his hands. “Are you doing alright?” Aizawa asks, his brows furrowed. “We can take a break if you need to.”

Izuku shakes his head. “No, I’m--I’m fine,” he says. “I just got distracted.” He takes a breath. “Can we--can we finish this up? I want to get out of the hospital.” Izuku watches Aizawa nod, his eyes still meeting Izuku’s.

“That’s fine,” Aizawa says. “I have a question about your quirk,” he says, and Izuku is suddenly struck by how *exhausted* Aizawa looks. He always looks tired, with the bags under his bloodshot eyes and the tangled mess of his hair, but Aizawa looks even more tired than usual, and Izuku can’t help but wonder how much of that is his fault.

“O-Okay,” Izuku says, swallowing. Aizawa doesn’t seem to notice his hesitation.

“Your quirk is what causes your illnesses,” Aizawa says. “But I’m having trouble figuring out how, exactly, a quirk that allows you to see the future would cause the symptoms that yours does.” He leans forward slightly, his face in its usual blankness. Izuku blinks.

“Oh, I-I don’t really know?” Izuku says, shrugging. “I mean, it’s obviously b-because of overuse, but I’m not sure of the mechanism.” It’s true, too, because even with Izuku’s actual quirk, he has no idea if it’s the fact that he’s dying or the turning back of time itself or something else entirely that makes him sick.

“Hm,” Aizawa says, narrowing his eyes slightly. “When you’re back at UA, you should see a quirk specialist,” he says. Izuku swallows, because that’s really not something he wants to have to do, actually, but thankfully it seems to be more of a suggestion than anything else. Tsukauchi sighs, lifting his arm and checking his watch.

“I think that’s about it for me,” Tsukauchi says, giving Izuku a smile. “I’ve got a meeting in a half hour, and if I think of anything else, I know where to find you.” He looks at Aizawa, then Nezu. “Do either of you have anything you need to ask?”

Nezu shakes his head. “Nope! I, too, have access to Midoriya whenever I might need to question him. If it should prove a problem to get him to tell the truth, well, I simply have to call you.” He gives Tsukauchi a wide smile that sends a shiver up Izuku’s spine. *I’ll need to be careful to make sure that Nezu never suspects me of lying*, he notes to himself.

“We’re not done talking about your safety,” Aizawa says, and Izuku freezes, but his teacher continues. “But I don’t see why we need to talk about that right now.” He sighs, standing up from his chair as Tsukauchi does the same beside him. Izuku blinks, standing up at the same time as Nezu.

“I-I actually have a question for you, Aizawa-sensei,” Izuku blurts out. The three adults pause, looking at Izuku, but after exchanging a glance and a nod, Nezu and Tsukauchi start moving out of the room again, with Tsukauchi obviously watching Izuku and Aizawa over his shoulder. Izuku waits as they walk out of the hospital room, even though this isn’t necessarily a private question. It’s just easier for him to talk, if it’s just Aizawa. He doesn’t *dislike* Nezu or Tsukauchi, but... he doesn’t trust them, not like he does Aizawa.

“What is it, Midoriya?” Aizawa asks. There isn’t a hint of impatience in his voice, and it’s soothing to Izuku, to hear his teacher’s flat tone. Izuku breathes.

“How did you--how did you figure it out? That I’m Ace, I mean,” Izuku says. Aizawa blinks.

“I thought it was fairly obvious,” Aizawa starts. “You showed up with the two--” he starts, but Izuku cuts him off.

“Not like--not like how you know now, but what was--what was the first thing? Was it really when I called you?” Izuku watches as his teacher blinks, before sighing and sitting back down in one of the three chairs pulled up next to the bed. Izuku copies him, sitting on the bed of the bed once more. It creaks slightly underneath him.

“When you went missing,” Aizawa says, his face tired and unexpressive as he looks at Izuku. “I alerted your mother. I called her, and she immediately said she needed to speak with me and the principal and that she was on her way over from the infirmary.” Izuku blinks, but Aizawa keeps talking. “I had to go to the raid, so I was on my way out. I spotted your mother and Bakugou walking towards the administration building.”

“K-Kacchan was there?” Izuku asks, blinking. Aizawa nods.

“I couldn’t stay for long, which I explained to them, but they were able to tell me two things.” Aizawa sighs. “Your mother told me that you were the vigilante Ace and that you were working with the villains who kidnapped you to take them down from within. Bakugou told me that you had a secret quirk with specific activation requirements that caused your mysterious illnesses.” Aizawa meets Izuku’s eyes. “I already suspected that you were Ace, so I had no trouble in believing them. I had no time to do anything with that knowledge, however, because I was a necessary part of the raid. By the time I returned...” Aizawa presses his lips together slightly. “We thought that you were at the raid,” he says. Izuku blinks.

“But I--I didn’t return when it was over,” he says. Aizawa nods.

“Toga was injured in the raid,” he says. “Not fatally. I was elsewhere during the raid itself, but she was definitely bleeding when she left.” Aizawa meets Izuku’s eyes, and Izuku suddenly gets it.

“You thought--you thought I was dead?” Izuku asks, blinking. Aizawa pauses, then shakes his head.

“No. It was a possibility, but we thought it was far more likely that you were injured and hiding so that your wounds wouldn’t give away your identity,” Aizawa sighs, his eyes closing for just a moment before he opens them again. Izuku nods, shakily.

“My mom, she--she did say she’d tell. If I went missing again,” he says. Aizawa nods.

“She said the same to me,” Aizawa says. “You should have told me. Much, much earlier.” His voice is dry, stern, but Izuku can tell from the way that he speaks that he’s holding back emotion. He can see it in the way Aizawa’s jaw clenches ever so slightly, the way that his shoulders hunch just the tiniest bit. Izuku draws in a deep breath.

“I know,” he whispers.

--

The first day back at the dorm feels surreal. It’s only been a week since the day of the rescue and the raid, but Izuku feels like he’s been away for a lifetime. It doesn’t help that in the week since he’d left, the leaves on the trees scattered throughout campus have gone from dark, rich green to shades of brilliant gold, bright orange, and deep maroon. The wooded part of campus is mostly pines and cedars, so it’s stayed green and dark, but even it manages to look seasonally appropriate with the way the morning light slants through the puffy clouds dotting the sky, staining the ground in soft golds. There’s a light breeze that dusts through campus, pulling along fallen leaves with it as Izuku walks through the gate, his mother at his side.

“Remember, only *light* exercise,” Inko says, her lips pressed together into a frown as she glances over at him. “And don’t lift anything that weighs twenty or more pounds. I know it doesn’t feel like it, but you’re still recovering. The healing quirks aren’t a substitute for--”

“Time and rest,” Izuku interrupts his mom, giving her a small smile and resisting the urge to roll his eyes. “I know, mom. I’ll be careful.” He leans over, nudging her with his elbow, and she sighs as she smiles and shakes her head.

“I just worry, Izuku. You don’t seem to have any concept of taking care of yourself,” she says as they walk down the center path, slowing to a stop at the place where their paths diverge. Inko glances to the side, at the path that leads to the building that houses the infirmary.

“I’ll be careful,” Izuku says. Inko arches an eyebrow at him, a sad smile on her face.

“I don’t know if I believe you,” she says, quietly. “But I know you’re smart. Please, Izuku, use some of your brain to watch out for yourself, okay?” Izuku swallows, nodding.

“I will,” he promises. His mom turns and starts to walk away from him. Izuku only watches her for a moment before he starts walking down the main path again, headed towards the rows of shiny identical dorm buildings.

He squints as he approaches the 1-A dorm. He can see two figures, both ash blonde and taller than he is, standing side by side at the bottom of the steps that lead to the dorm. Izuku thinks that he can see spiky, wild hair on one of them and smooth, styled hair on the other, but that can’t be right. Izuku doesn’t think he’s seen Kacchan and Neito together willingly *ever*, not since... well, ever.

As Izuku draws closer, he realizes that it *is* Kacchan and Neito. Kacchan is wearing a black and orange hoodie that’s easily four sizes too big for him and a pair of fitted skinny jeans, while Neito is wearing a leather jacket over a pale blue shirt and a pair of black skinny jeans. The two of them are both fashionable, like usual--Izuku wonders as he looks at them, Kacchan with his hands crossed over his chest and Neito with one on his hip and the other hanging loosely at his side, wonders if the two of them might actually get along. *They have a lot in common, now that I think about it.*

“Oi, nerd!” Kacchan shouts as soon as Izuku’s within a reasonable distance. “Will you hurry up already? It’s fucking cold out,” he shouts. Izuku remembers that Kacchan always runs cold, ever since they were kids. He smiles, the edges of his lips tugging up slightly, and he picks up his pace.

“I missed you too, Kacchan!” Izuku shouts back, smiling wider when Kacchan’s eyes narrow. From next to Kacchan, Neito rolls his eyes, taking a few steps forward to stand in front of Izuku. Izuku stops, blinking up at his friend. Neito stares down at him through pale lashes.

“Do you want me to get your bag?” Neito asks, nodding his head toward the backpack Izuku’s carrying on one shoulder. Izuku reaches up, feeling at the strap.

“Oh, n-no, it’s really light!” Izuku says, smiling. “It’s just like, chargers and a few changes of clothes,” he says, but when Neito holds a hand out, Izuku slides the bag off of his shoulder and hands it to his friend anyway. Neito takes it, slinging it over one shoulder. He looks Izuku up and down, then sighs.

“Can I hug you?” he asks, his lips curving down ever so slightly. “I--you worried me, Izuku.” Izuku blinks, nodding, and Neito pulls him into a careful, gentle hug. It’s quick and soft, Neito’s arms squeezing gently at Izuku’s back as Izuku wraps his arms around Neito’s waist. They’re already pulling away from each other when Kacchan snorts, rolling his eyes.

“Nasty,” he says, turning and starting to stomp up the steps. “Are you two idiots going to paint each other’s nails now, or are you going to get your asses into the dorm?” Kacchan calls back, craning his head over his shoulder to look at them. Izuku glances over at Neito with an apologetic smile, and they start up the stairs after Kacchan.

“How have--how have classes been?” Izuku asks, half because he wants to hear how his friends have been doing and half because he’s a little worried about falling behind on his school work. Aizawa had told him multiple times that it was fine, that he wouldn’t fail because he’d been injured, that Kirishima was missing class, too, but that didn’t stop Izuku from being nervous about it.

“Fucking boring,” Kacchan grumbles. “I got my shitty license, though.” It’s added like an afterthought, but Izuku can tell from the way Kacchan glances back at Izuku with narrowed red eyes that Kacchan is excited but trying not to show it. Izuku smiles wide.

“That’s amazing! Congrats, Kacchan!” he says brightly. Neito chuckles beside him.

“Things have been good for me, too,” he says. “And *I* passed the licensing exam the first time,” Neito adds, and Izuku catches him smirking at Kacchan when he looks over. Izuku elbows Neito in the side.

“It’s not a competition,” Izuku says, trying to use the same gently scolding tone of voice his mom is so good at. Neito shrugs, raising his hands and grinning.

“What can I say? Bakugou just makes it so easy,” Neito says, and Izuku resists the urge to shove him again. He’s distracted by Kacchan puffing up angrily and whirling around on his heels to face Neito as the three of them reach the top of the stairs.

“Fucking stupid copycat bastard,” Kacchan spits. “I don’t make anything or *do* anything easy.” Izuku sighs, stepping in between them to tug open the door to the 1-A dorm. The warm air that washes over him from inside is welcome and comforting against his chilled skin.

“Come *on*,” Izuku says, standing with the door open. “I’m cold and I want to--to put my stuff away.” He shuffles impatiently as Kacchan and Neito spend another moment staring at each other before Neito rolls his eyes and steps into the 1-A dorm, with Kacchan stomping in close behind him.

Izuku suspects that at least some of the fighting is an act to relax him, to make him feel at home, but he can’t bring himself to mind, since it’s working. Kacchan keeps muttering stuff under his breath as Izuku heads towards the stairs, stuff that Izuku can’t make out, but it’s kind of nice to hear someone’s voice who isn’t an adult or a hospital patient. It’s not that his friends hadn’t visited him--they had--but they’d been busy enough during the school week that it’s been a few days since he saw them. *Probably didn’t help that Aizawa was with me*, Izuku thinks. *He usually would come with one of us if we left campus in the evening.*

“Izuku,” Neito says, cutting through Izuku’s thoughts. “Shouldn’t you take the elevator?” Izuku blinks, turning to look at him. Neito and Kacchan are standing side by side, only a few paces back from where Izuku is standing just in front of the stairs.

“Oh,” Izuku says, “I-I don’t really like elevators.” Neito and Kacchan stare at him for a moment, before they look at each other, exchanging some kind of wordless glance. Izuku feels vaguely unbalanced by the fact that apparently, at some point, Kacchan and Neito had become able to do that.

“Okay,” Neito says, shrugging. “Take it slow, though.” His eyes flicker down to Izuku’s side, where the bullet wound is hidden under Izuku’s thick hoodie, before they move up to Izuku’s face. Izuku sighs, smiling fondly as he turns and starts up the stairs.

“I’m not--I’m not *fragile* , you know,” Izuku says. “I’m mostly healed, anyway.”

“That’s not what Auntie Inko said,” Kacchan growls, and Izuku swallows. He’d almost forgotten that his mom and Kacchan had each other’s phone numbers.

“Stairs are light exercise,” Izuku says, taking them two at a time just to prove that he can. He hears someone huff in frustration behind him, but really, it could be either of them.

“You’d manage to get hurt even if you were lying in bed in full fucking body armor,” Kacchan grumbles. Izuku giggles as he steps onto the second floor, walking to his room and fishing his key out of his hoodie pocket. It’s a movement that’s strangely reminiscent of the rescue, of getting knives and phones and flashlights out of a hoodie pocket. Izuku swallows down the fear that prickles in his throat and steps into his dorm room, decorated in green and black and messy and *home* . He turns to Kacchan and Neito.

“We should--we should watch a movie or something,” Izuku says. Neito blinks, but he quickly seems to accept it, smiling.

“Sure,” he says, “but Blasty doesn’t get to pick the movie,” Neito says as he walks into Izuku’s dorm room, shrugging off his leather jacket and laying it on Izuku’s dresser like he’s done so many times before. Kacchan’s eyes narrow, but he walks into the room, too.

Chapter End Notes

content warning: medical stuff and that's about it i think

[discord!](#)

i hope you enjoyed!!!! thank you for the support :D :D :D :D we should get to more
Plot next chapter :D

warning shot

Chapter Summary

last time: izuku got questioned, goes back to the dorms, and vibes

Chapter Notes

:3c hi sorry this is so late in the day i've been being a lazy motherfucker all day and im proud

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

It's raining outside when Izuku finally, finally gets to go back to class on Thursday, a week and three days since the raid. He'd meant to see all of his friends sooner, but between Recovery Girl's treatments, sleeping off her treatments, and trying to catch up on all of his missed schoolwork, he really hadn't seen anyone except for Kacchan, Shinsou, and Neito.

Izuku's a little early as he walks down the hallway, the soft sounds of the rain outside muffled by the walls around him, so he doesn't expect to see anyone in the classroom except maybe Kacchan and Iida. Izuku's too early, really, for anyone else to be there, and it's intentional. He'd much rather talk to one person at a time then deal with all of his friends' questions and doubt. He knows it looks bad--he disappeared during a raid that he wasn't supposed to know about, then returned injured. If any of his friends have considered the idea of a traitor, they've surely doubted him.

Izuku certainly isn't expecting to see Uraraka, Tsuyu, Todoroki, Yaoyorozu, and Iida all already sitting in the classroom, watching the door as Izuku slides it open. It's not a shock that Kacchan is sitting in the back of the classroom, flipping through a book with his feet propped up on the desk, but Izuku knows it's not an accident that so many of his classmates are here already. Izuku swallows, tugging the door about halfway shut behind him and awkwardly raising a hand in a slight wave.

"H-Hey," he says, giving them a shaky smile. Uraraka is the first one to break from the startled, almost scared expression on her face, her lips melting into a smile and her eyes softening, her bottom eyelids pressing up slightly with the width of her smile.

"You're okay!" she says, sighing with relief, her shoulders sagging. "Oh Deku, everyone was so worried," she says, and Izuku watches Yaoyorozu and Todoroki nod in tandem, even though Izuku knows Todoroki knows the whole story.

"Y-You were worried?" Izuku asks, wracking his brain to try and remember the exact cover story Aizawa told the entirety of the class. It was something about Izuku slipping out and running into a criminal by chance, getting attacked and saving another victim in the process of defending himself. Izuku thinks, though, that Uraraka and Tsuyu were surely told more, given that they were a part of the Shie Hassaikai raid. *I really need to start keeping a log of who knows what*, Izuku thinks. *Maybe in one of my notebooks*.

“Of course we were worried!” Iida says, getting up widely. “You were in the hospital for over a week and have not been seen since your return! We were under the impression that you were gravely injured or...” he trails off, glancing at Yaoyorozu. She seems to get the idea, nodding and finishing for him.

“We were worried that you might be struggling mentally or physically after your ordeal,” she says, softly. “Aizawa-sensei told us that you’d been shot and that you’d be okay, but none of us had seen you since those first few days, and you weren’t exactly... coherent,” she says. Izuku blinks, remembering vaguely that Aizawa had said his class had tried to all come together to visit him last Wednesday, when he’d just gotten out of surgery and the news had hit that he was in the hospital.

“Oh, I’m--I’m doing a lot better, now!” Izuku says, giving them a smile. “I’m pretty much healed,” he adds, trying his best to ignore the snort from Kacchan at the back of the classroom. He steps into the room, walking to his seat and setting his bag down beside his chair. Everyone turns to keep looking at him, save for Kacchan, who’s still pretending not to be paying attention to the conversation.

“Are you sure?” Todoroki asks, tipping his head to the side slightly. “You were pretty badly hurt.” Izuku sees heads nodding, and he shrugs, trying to push down the burning embarrassment that tries to flare up on his cheeks.

“It’s--It’s nothing Recovery Girl can’t fix,” Izuku mumbles. He sees Todoroki nod, slowly, seeming to accept that.

“Well, I’m glad you’re back, ribbit,” Tsuyu says. “Between you and Kirishima missing, it really felt empty in here.” Izuku glances over to her, seeing Uraraka nod next to her.

“Yeah, and he’s not even back yet,” Uraraka says, her lips twitching down into a frown. Izuku swallows. Despite being at the same hospital, he’d hardly seen Kirishima. He knows that his classmate is in a similar situation as him, where he’ll be okay after quirk healing for some time, but he also knows that Kirishima’s wounds had been worse than his. It makes him feel stupid and selfish, for hogging Aizawa’s and his friends’ attention.

“Shitty Hair’s coming back on Monday,” Kacchan says from the back of the room, and Izuku turns to look at him. “He’s spending some time at home with his moms or whatever. He’s fucking fine, so stop acting like he’s dead,” Kacchan spits. Izuku blinks, letting out a small, relieved breath. He glances to the side, where other classmates are exchanging similar looks of relief. Yaoyorozu sighs, pressing the palm of one hand to her cheek.

“I didn’t think that we’d have to face so much difficulty so early in our careers as heroes,” she says, her brows drawing together and her lips pressing together into a thin frown. “It’s.... it’s scary, frankly.” Izuku swallows. *I’m responsible for at least part of that danger*, he thinks to himself.

“It’s good training for the real world,” Todoroki says, quietly. Izuku glances up at him, seeing his friend with a thoughtful expression on his face. “I think that I would rather go through this now, with the support of the school and the teachers and the entire class, than go through this alone.” Izuku blinks, opening his mouth to reply, but Tsuyu starts to speak before he can say anything.

“You won’t be alone after this, either, ribbit,” Tsuyu says. “I don’t speak for the entire class, but I don’t plan on dropping contact after we graduate.” Izuku nods, and Uraraka does too, her brown hair swishing as she nods.

“Yeah!” she says, raising a fist in the air. “1-A will stick together until the end,” she says, smiling. “None of us are ever going to have to fight alone.” Izuku watches, blinking, as the rest of his

friends start to nod, too. He has mixed feelings bubble up in his chest as he thinks about it, because as nice of an idea as it is, Izuku is already fighting alone in so many ways.

Maybe I don't have to, he thinks, as Shinsou and Kaminari walk into the classroom, Kaminari stopping mid-sentence to stare at Izuku opened mouthed. Shinsou doesn't seem shocked, sighing and rolling his eyes as Kaminari shouts,

“Oh my god dude, you're alive!” he says, rushing forward into the classroom. Izuku makes eye contact with Shinsou where his friend waits in the doorway. It's a reminder that, even though nobody knows *everything*, that someone knows each piece of the puzzle. Even if Neito, who knows about his quirk, and Miura, who knows every piece of his involvement with the Gekkeiju, don't know each piece, they know *something*. Even if he can't tell Aizawa the truth of his quirk, can't tell Shinsou or Kacchan or Todoroki that he's been killing himself to save others, it doesn't mean that he can't talk to them, right?

Izuku listens to Kaminari chatter at him as the rest of his classmates start to filter into the classroom, one by one. It's a good feeling, being back at school.

--

Izuku's sitting on the couch in the common room, watching the news on the television when he sees it. Izuku's started watching the news every evening. He's not entirely sure why he started doing it, but it's something that he's been doing since he came back to the dorms, and Todoroki and Iida always join him.

Tonight, Shinsou's joined them, too, and Izuku is sitting beside him on the couch, Izuku's legs are pulled up under him, his knees tucked up into his chest, and he's leaned up against one armrest. Shinsou's sitting cross legged on the couch, and Todoroki and Iida each take up an armchair on either side of the couch, Iida sitting up straight and normal and Todoroki draped sideways over the chair. He's only started relaxing like that recently, and only when it's been a few days since he's visited his father. Seeing it makes Izuku feel warm inside, and so he's feeling soft and calm when the news switches to show a woman with teal hair and a bright orange bandana.

“The Gekkeiju are a previously unknown criminal organization,” a reporter says, presumably off screen. His voice is quick and fast. “How long has the Commission been keeping this information secret from the public?” Izuku feels cold ice run down his spine, and he shifts, wrapping his arms around his legs. He can see Shinsou glance at him from the other side of the couch. The woman on screen smiles, not seeming phased.

“This group is really dangerous,” she says. “But not to ordinary citizens. We have good reason to believe that this group is targeting specific individuals and has no intention of causing harm to the public.” Her smile turned slightly strained. “That is, until recently.”

“Who is that?” Shinsou asks, looking at Izuku. “Do you know her?” Izuku blinks, shaking his head. He doesn't recognize this pro.

“That's Ms. Joke,” Todoroki says. “She was at a lot of our remedial trainings.” Izuku blinks, glancing over at Todoroki, because he recognizes that name. Ms. Joke is the pro that Ren had named as her mentor, that she'd been working under. Izuku turns back to the TV as Ms. Joke keeps talking.

“I led an undercover break-in of one of the Gekkeiju's bases last Monday,” Ms. Joke says to the camera. “I was able to both recover captives and obtain privileged information on the Gekkeiju's operations.” Izuku takes in a breath, then bites at his lower lip to suppress any other reactions. *This*

is how they're protecting me , he realizes. The reporter behind the camera hums.

“What information did you get?” he asks. Ms. Joke smiles slightly.

“We have reason to believe that the Gekkeiju are specifically targeting children who have recently received quirk counseling for a mental quirk,” she says. “It’s not good news, but it means that we can tell you guys how to keep your kids safe.” Ms Joke smiles slightly, but it looks bitter. “Don’t let your kids go anywhere without an adult, and don’t leave them alone at home with any babysitter under the age of eighteen. The Gekkeiju prefer easy targets. If you keep your children under close watch, they won’t be in danger,” she says.

“Is that supposed to reassure the families whose kids might be taken?” the reporter asks, his voice loud and harsh. “What does the Commission think it’s doing? *Are* they even doing anything?” Ms. Joke has a plastered on, unmoving smile.

“No further comment at this time,” she says, and the screen suddenly switches to a shot from within a studio. Two reporters, one with bright pink hair in dreadlocks down her back and the other with a high, black bun, sit wearing suits in comfy looking chairs.

“Have you heard about the Gekkeiju, Moriyama?” the man with the dark bun asks. Moriyama shakes her head, reaching up to tug one of her dreads behind her ear. Izuku notices that her hands, dark and slender, seem to have vines or roots of some kind twisting around her fingers. *Must be her quirk* , Izuku thinks.

“I haven’t,” Moriyama says. “I have to agree with our friend out in the field, though,” she says. “I don’t really get why the Commission has been hiding this from the public. They already had captives, right? So then they’ve already gotten at least two kids.” Moriyama leans back in the dark maroon chair she sits in, waving a hand. “It looks to me like they’ve realized they’re in over their heads and they’re trying to cover their asses.” The man sitting across from her hums, folding his hands together in front of him.

“But if that was the case, I don’t think they’d be telling us now,” he says, tapping a finger to his chin. “I mean, there hadn’t been any sign of this group even *existing* before Ms. Joke asked to make her statement.” He tips his head slightly to the side, a loose strand of black hair falling in front of his face. “I would assume that there’s a lot we haven’t been told.” Moriyama hums, her face twisting in thought, before she turns to smile at the camera.

“That’s all the info we’ve got so far, folks,” she says. “Stay tuned, and we’ll follow up on this story in the next hour. Next up, we have Honda with the weather,” she says. Izuku stares at the screen, watching as it changes quickly to show a map of Japan in various colors. Izuku’s friends all watch him out of the corners of their eyes. Izuku knows they’re not stupid--Izuku went missing, came back with two rescues. Ms. Joke is talking about a raid on a villain base that ended in a rescue. Even Iida, who doesn’t have any idea of the full picture, might find it a little strange.

None of them press him on it tonight, though, and for that, Izuku’s grateful. It only takes him a few moments, though, for his nerves to start buzzing on their own, prickling at the back of his mind and making him shift in his seat. The Gekkeiju always, *always* has the news running at the tower. There’s no way they haven’t seen this broadcast, no way they hadn’t seen earlier segments that Izuku’s missed. Izuku swallows, shifting so he’s sitting with his feet on the floor. He presses his palms into the fabric of his sweats, just above his knees.

“You okay?” Shinsou asks, his voice a low whisper. Izuku nods, his head jerking a little too fast.

“Y-Yeah,” Izuku says. “I just--I’ll be right back,” he says, louder, and he stands up. Izuku ignores

the way that his friends' eyes are glued to him as he walks out of the common room and towards the stairs, clenching his hands into fists at his side. He can feel his heart fluttering too-fast in his chest, can feel a familiar pain in his gut. He knows that his side is pretty much healed, that more of the treatments now were to restore his strength and heal what was left of the damage from his quirk and the surgery, but Izuku's side still stings. It's a minor pain, like a stitch in his side, and he ignores it as he steps up the last few stairs.

He walks to his door and unlocks it quickly, stepping inside and shutting it behind him. Ever since the incident with Shinsou and Aizawa, Izuku hasn't forgotten to lock it, not once, and he's not going to. He doesn't want to get caught doing something, whether that's working on homework or hurting himself.

Tonight, though, he doesn't do either. He opens his closet and slips his hand into the box that holds his burner phones, pulling out the one from the Gekkeiju. He knows, even as he's turning it on and the screen is flashing through the loading pattern, that there will be a message.

There isn't one message--there's three. The first two are from Fury, and they're from the day of the raid. The other is from Sasaki, who Izuku has never once received a text from. There is no message preview. Izuku swallows, opening Fury's messages first.

You're at raid rn, text after with report, Fury's first message reads. It's sent from the morning, when Izuku would have been in the tower breaking Ren and Mouse out. *He must not have been at the tower or at the raid*, Izuku realizes. He files that information away for later. He reads the second message.

Where tf are u? Emergency. Come to the tower or there will be consequences, is the next message. Izuku swallows. He's not exactly looking forward to facing those consequences. Izuku starts to type out a reply, but he pauses, backing out of Fury's messages to open the one from Sasaki. It was sent just a few minutes ago.

Come in this weekend, it reads. *Don't try anything funny. You wouldn't want to be responsible for someone losing an arm or a leg, would you?* Izuku swallows. His hands are hovering over the keys when the next message comes in.

Tell Ms. Joke I said hi. Izuku blinks at his phone. He knows that it should send a chill down his spine, knows that it should make him nervous. Izuku just feels dumbfounded, like he has whiplash. He blinks at his phone. He didn't know what he was thinking, didn't know what he'd expected was going to happen, but it wasn't this. Izuku thinks, maybe, that he might have thought he'd get lucky. That Sasaki might not have suspected him at all. Or maybe, Izuku thought it was all going to be over, that Sasaki would take one look at the wounds on Dollface, the damage to the electrical box, and *know* it was him.

This is neither of those things. Izuku knows that he's going to be hurt when he goes back to the tower, knows that it's going to suck, that he's going to suffer for it. But right now, all he can feel is a small glimmer of hope. *It's not completely over*, he thinks. *If Sasaki thinks I just ratted to Ms. Joke, I can fix this*.

--

Izuku feels like he's walking into detention when he stops in front of Aizawa's door in the teacher's dorm. He swallows, wiping sweat off of his palms and onto the front of his sweatshirt, then raises a hand and raps his knuckles against the wooden surface of the door. It echoes in the hallway, filtering through the quiet space. Izuku can hear his own breathing in the beat that passes before Aizawa opens the door, a scowl on his face and his hair pulled back in a messy bun.

“What is it?” Aizawa asks, his gaze coming to rest on Izuku. Izuku swallows, holding up his burner phone.

“I-I need to go back to the Gekkeiju’s tower this weekend,” Izuku says, curling his fingers around the hem of his shirt, digging his fingers into the fabric of the sleeves. Aizawa blinks, leaning forward and reading the message. He exhales slowly, through his mouth, as he pulls back.

“They bought that it was someone else who made the break-in, but not that you weren’t involved, huh?” Aizawa says, his lips pressing into a thin line. “I’d really rather you not go, considering that you’ve outright told me that these people torture you.” Izuku bites at his lower lip and clenches his hands into fists so tight that he’s sure his knuckles have gone white from squeezing all of the blood from the flesh.

“I have to--I have to go,” Izuku says. “Look at her earlier message, she--she said she’s gonna cut--she’s going to take someone’s arm or leg if I don’t show up,” he says, thrusting the phone out at Aizawa.

“How do you know she won’t do that to you?” Aizawa asks, arching a brow. Izuku swallows.

“She won’t,” Izuku says. “If she was--if she was going to do anything permanent to me, she’d just kill me.” Izuku’s betrayed her and been caught before, and she’d killed him. Sasaki doesn’t seem to have any qualms about doing that, about striking him down if he misbehaves. It’s something that works in Izuku’s favor, funnily enough.

“That doesn’t make me feel any better about sending you,” Aizawa says, slowly, like it should be obvious. Izuku squints at him.

“If she’s going to kill me, I’ll see it,” he says. “My quirk--it’ll warn me.” Aizawa raises an eyebrow.

“That doesn’t mean you’ll be able to get away,” Aizawa points out. “You could know exactly what she’s going to do and just not be in a position that *lets* you escape.” Izuku takes in a slow breath. There’s no way he can tell Aizawa that he can’t die, that he’ll get as many tries as he wants, so he tries another tactic.

“I can handle whatever she--whatever the Gekkeiju does to me,” Izuku says. “Whoever they’re going to--to punish, if I don’t show up, they *can’t*.” Izuku meets Aizawa’s gaze. “I have to do this.”

Aizawa sighs, pushing a hand through his hair. He takes a step back, into his room, and Izuku watches him pace back and forth over the same few feet of tile for a few moments before he turns back to look at Izuku, his lips pressed into a line.

“Fine,” Aizawa grits out. “But you’re going with a wire on you, and you’re going to give me some intel on the Gekkeiju members.” He raises a hand before Izuku can even protest, can even start to panic. “I know it’s difficult for you, but one thing I am *not* willing to do is send you in without any knowledge on how to get you out if things go wrong. You’re telling me what you know about the Gekkeiju’s members and base, or you’re staying here.”

Izuku blinks. “What--what do you want to know?” he asks. “I thought--I thought I’d already told you,” Izuku says, chewing at his bottom lip. Aizawa turns to him, his brows furrowed in confusion.

“You haven’t,” Aizawa says. “What makes you think that you have?” Izuku fidgets in the doorway, the salty taste of blood exploding in Izuku’s mouth as he pulls a piece of skin from his

bottom lip.

“I...” Izuku runs his tongue over the small cut. “I just thought--I thought I would have by now, I guess.” When he stops to think about it, he can’t remember sitting down and telling Aizawa about the Gekkeiju. He can’t remember explaining it, can’t remember giving names or locations or anything. But the thing is, it just feels like they should know by now, that at some point, through all the painful conversations and the tears, that they would know something. Izuku, suddenly, feels a rush of guilt through his chest. Aizawa and his mom and his friends have seen him hurt and crying and in pain, have been through pain and tears for him, and he hasn’t told them a thing, not without it being ripped out of him while he fought every step of the way.

“Midoriya?” Aizawa asks, and when Izuku blinks up at him, Aizawa’s face is tinted with concern. Izuku swallows.

“I-I’m okay,” he says. “There’s--there’s a lot to tell you, though.” Aizawa blinks. He steps forward, flicking on a light.

“Come in,” he says, stepping back and giving Izuku room to walk through, into the teacher’s dorm. Izuku steps inside, his feet moving quietly over the wooden floor. The room is bigger than the student dorms, with a little common area with two fridges and a microwave pushed against one wall, shelves and a television on the other. There’s even an old, beat-up grey couch and a fluffy yellow rug. The sink is full of coffee cups. There are three doors on the far wall of the room, one open, showing a plain bathroom. Izuku’s surprised, considering that the first floor of the teacher’s dorms had looked near identical to the 1-A dorm. *It must be because they’re teachers.*

“Have a seat,” Aizawa says, gesturing to the couch. “Hizashi’s here, but he’s asleep,” he waves at one of the closed doors, and Izuku blinks, but moves to sit on the couch. It’s soft underneath him.

“Hizashi?” he asks. “Won’t we--won’t we wake him up?” Aizawa blinks, glancing back at Izuku, then shakes his head.

“Present Mic, I mean,” Aizawa says, sighing as he walks over to sit down beside Izuku on the couch. He sighs as he sits down, and Izuku wonders if his joints hurt, from the way he’s moving. “We won’t wake him up. He doesn’t wear his hearing aids to bed,” Aizawa says, sighing. Izuku nods.

“R-Right,” Izuku says, chewing on the cut he’d made in his lip. He watches Aizawa’s eyes flicker down to Izuku’s mouth.

“Stop biting your lip. You’re bleeding,” Aizawa says. His eyes narrow slightly. “And you were going to tell me about the Gekkeiju.” Izuku stops biting on his lip, but he digs his nails into the palms of his hand instead, letting the sharp sensation ground him.

“The leader--her name is Maiko Sasaki,” Izuku says, looking down at his lap. “She goes by--by Phosgene. She was in America a while back, and her quirk is called Imposition.” Aizawa blinks, his brows drawing together.

“Hold on,” he says, standing up quickly and walking over to one of the rooms, opening the door. “I need to get something to write this down with.” Izuku blinks, watching as his teacher moves.

“Oh, o-okay,” Izuku says. Aizawa steps back out of the dark room with a composition notebook and a black pen, tugging the door shut as he walks back into the room. He sits down on the couch, breathing out.

“We knew that you hadn’t shared everything you knew,” Aizawa says, shaking his head the smallest bit. “But none of us expected that you knew this much.” Izuku blinks, nodding shortly.

“Maiko Sasaki,” Izuku says again. “Phosgene, quirk is Imposition. It--it lets her inflict any experience she’s--she’s felt. She shares the senses, the feeling, the everything.” Izuku shivers. Aizawa scribbles something down in the notebook, his eyes creasing slightly.

“She used it on you,” Aizawa says. It’s not a question, but Izuku knows that he’s asking him to elaborate.

“Y-Yeah,” Izuku says. “She gave me--gave me, um, she made me experience heatstroke,” Izuku says, staring at his hands wrapped up in the sleeves of his oversized shirt. He hears Aizawa suck in a sharp breath.

“Heatstroke?” Aizawa asks. “When was this? Did you see a doctor? Get any medical care whatsoever?” Izuku looks up, sees raw concern on Aizawa’s face. *This is why I don’t like telling people things*, he thinks, even though he knows that that’s not the only reason why.

“It--it went away as soon as she stopped,” Izuku says, shaking his head. “It wasn’t like--it wasn’t like she made me sick, it was like I was--like I was borrowing it.” He blinks, looking up at Aizawa. His mouth opens slightly, and Aizawa’s brows furrow.

“What is it?” Aizawa asks. Izuku blinks.

“I think I--I think I might know what kind of quirks they’re looking for,” Izuku says, the words spilling out of him quickly. “It’s just--just a hunch, but I think--two of the lieutenants, they have mental quirks, too,” Izuku runs a hand through his hair, tugging at the strands. “Fury--his name is Kazuo Furuya--his quirk is Heaven and Hell. He can make people feel either the worst pain ever or--or--or the best that they--that they can feel.” Izuku shakes his head. “But he--he has to make eye contact. Sasaki doesn’t, if she’s been under the effects of his quirk, she can give--”

“She can give it to anyone in her range,” Aizawa finishes for him. Izuku pauses, looking up and nods. Aizawa’s brows are creased, the look on his face a mixture of thoughtfulness and concern. “Midoriya, you said Fury had used his quirk on you. Did he--”

“Both,” Izuku says, before Aizawa can ask. “That’s--that’s not important right now,” he says, wrapping his hands around each other and wringing them together. Aizawa sighs.

“It *is* important,” Aizawa says, sighing, but before Izuku can protest, he keeps talking. “It can wait, though. Keep going.” Izuku nods, taking a breath.

“Fangirl, um, the one who fought with Stain. Her name is Manami Furuya. She’s--she’s Fury’s younger sister, and her quirk--it’s some kind of emotional amplification on touch, and it gives a strength boost too.” Izuku looks over to Aizawa, and he feels some kind of strange smile pull at his face. “It should amplify quirks too, right? If it--if it’s amplifying physical abilities, it should boost quirks, too. If she amplified Fury’s quirk and Fury used it on Sasaki...” Izuku trails off. “They want people--quirks--that can give Sasaki more ammunition. More power,” he finishes, breathless and excited. Aizawa stares at him.

“Yamauchi’s quirk,” Aizawa says. “If they’d kept her, they could give Sasaki any injury they wanted, then take it away so she wouldn’t have to heal.” Aizawa leans forward, leaning his head in his hands. “Monoma--if they’d gotten him on their side, there’d have been no need for any other person to cooperate. They would only need Monoma to copy it.” Izuku nods, feeling a mix of sick to his stomach and like he’s bubbling up with excitement.

“They--they used Mouse as a lie detector, but her quirk turns off if you tell the truth to the question you initially lied to,” Izuku says. “Sasaki has that--she can inflict that on people.” Aizawa nods, his brows creasing together.

“They’re looking for people with mental quirks,” Aizawa says, “both people who can give them something to use and people who can make them use other people.” Aizawa’s gaze snaps up to Izuku. “Who’s the traitor?” he asks, suddenly, his voice sharp. Izuku blinks.

“I-I can’t tell you,” Izuku says. “You know that--that I can’t tell you that, I told you--”

“Do they know Shinsou?” Aizawa asks, his lips pressed into a thin line. “I need to know, Midoriya.” He turns his head, his eyes meeting Izuku’s. Izuku swallows, a wave of cold dread washing over him.

“If they have Shinsou,” Izuku says, “they have anyone. It’s like Neito but--but Shinsou, if he can tell someone to sleep, he can--he can tell them to feel something, tell them to--to experience something.” Izuku swallows, staring at Aizawa. “They--they know Shinsou.” He presses one hand over his mouth. “I-I can’t--Aizawa-sensei, I can’t tell you, they would--” Izuku starts, but Aizawa reaches up, slowly, carefully, and tugs Izuku’s hand away from his mouth. Even though Izuku can see Aizawa coming, he still flinches slightly.

“Breathe,” Aizawa says, his brows creased. “Midoriya, I can’t do anything to help them if I don’t know who it is, and if--” Izuku shuts his eyes, forces it out.

“You can’t--you can't tell *anyone*,” Izuku says. “And you have to--you have to let me go this weekend.” Aizawa sighs, his brows furrowed heavily, his lips in a frown.

“Fine,” Aizawa says. “Who is it, Midoriya?” Izuku swallows, shutting his eyes. He wants to tell Aizawa, wants to be able to trust him, wants to stop hurting people by keeping things quiet, but Izuku is also afraid. Izuku breathes in, out.

“It’s Haruta,” Izuku says, his voice soft and shaky. He keeps his eyes shut, but he can’t avoid hearing the sharp intake of breath from Aizawa, can’t avoid hearing when Aizawa swears under his breath.

“Fuck,” Aizawa says, quietly, and Izuku has to agree with the sentiment.

Chapter End Notes

content warning: talk of torture, mentions of nausea

[discord!](#) [carrrd!](#) if the discord link hasn't been working for you, the one in the carrrd might :D

I HOPE YOU ENJOYED GAMERS >:D also sorry for the plotheoles with izuku never getting asked why he hid his quirk i am stoopid

help

Chapter Summary

last time: izuku learns ms joke is covering for him, gets a text from sasaki, and has a conversation with aizawa about the traitor

Chapter Notes

what's up gamers today had a bad vibe but at least i finished the chapter

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Sitting in Nezu's office is an uncomfortable activity under the best of circumstances. Right now, with Aizawa sitting in the chair next to him and Izuku's head pounding from lack of sleep, with Nezu loudly humming and making the three of them tea, it's more than just uncomfortable; it's nerve-wracking. Izuku thinks, maybe, that he should be less nervous about meeting with his principal to decide how he should deal with a villain organization and be more nervous about the villains themselves, but, well, Izuku's brain doesn't seem to be capable of logic.

That's why he's bouncing his leg and wringing his hands together as he tries to place the song that Nezu's humming. Izuku thinks that there's no way that Nezu is actually this calm about the situation--even if he's smiling and humming and making tea, even if he'd insisted that Aizawa and Izuku have a seat and breathe for a moment. Izuku supposes that, between the way Izuku had been halfway to a panic attack and Aizawa's desperate, urgent expression, they probably did need to be told to breathe, to relax, but Izuku thinks that their panic is warranted, given the situation.

Nezu turns from the electric kettle, a tray with three cups of steaming tea held in his paws. He walks from the other side of the cozy office, carrying the tray with practiced ease across the soft grey carpet. Nezu's office is decorated with a number of pictures, mostly of the teachers and people who Izuku assumes are former students, and there are books scattered about everywhere, with about as many on the floor as there are on the shelves. Most of the room is taken up by a high-tech looking computer setup with three monitors and a huge, rollable office chair, but there's also a wooden table with a total of four padded grey chairs, two on each side. Nezu'd made the tea at a little cart pushed up against the wall by a window with the curtains open, revealing the night sky. Izuku swallows. It's a reminder that this isn't a normal school meeting, that this isn't because Izuku failed an exam or got in a fight.

"Now," Nezu says, setting the tray on the table and stepping back, walking over to one of the chairs that faces Izuku and Aizawa. "What is it that had you two calling me for an emergency meeting this time of night?" He crosses one leg over the other, reaching forward to take a cup of tea, which he cradles in both palms on his lap as he looks at Izuku and Aizawa attentively.

"Midoriya has a lot more information than we suspected," Aizawa says, his voice rough. "He also told me who the traitor is." Nezu blinks, his brows raising.

"Well, that's certainly concerning," he says, taking a sip of his tea. "Based upon the fact that you

haven't told me their identity and that you look like you did when Midoriya was in the hands of the Gekkeiju after the summer camp, I'm assuming it's our little mind reader." Izuku stiffens as Aizawa nods quickly beside him, his teacher's jaw clenched tight. Izuku swallows, shaking his head.

"H-How do--how do you know?" Izuku asks. Nezu glances over at him, his smile gone but his face still calm.

"Midoriya, there are very few people who had access to the information the Gekkeiju were able to obtain regarding the summer camp," Nezu says. "The fact is that it's simply very unlikely that any of the people who were *supposed* to know that information were the ones who leaked it. It would give them away, for one thing, and for another, all of us were questioned by Tsukauchi." Nezu takes a slow drink from his tea, then leans forward, setting it down on the table. "Combine that with Haruta's unwillingness to move into the dorms, his numerous unexplained absences from school, and his unique ability to obtain information directly from the minds of whoever he chooses to, and he was one of our top candidates." Nezu smiles, slightly. "One of the others, of course, was you."

Izuku blinks. "Me?" he asks, feeling his brows pull together. Nezu nods.

"Yes, you," he says, a hint of amusement in his voice. "You've showed up with unexplained injuries multiple times and you've shown signs of abuse and trauma that are consistent with being in that sort of situation." Nezu reaches out, taking his cup of tea from the table. "Have some tea, Midoriya," he says, raising his own cup slightly. "You look like you're about to faint," he says, a hint of amusement in his voice, but his gaze is steady as he looks at Izuku. Izuku swallows, reaching forward and grabbing his cup of tea. It's a pale, green-brown color, and when he takes a sip, it tastes of green tea and mint. It's soothing, but not enough to slow Izuku's fast-beating heart.

"So, what--what do we do?" Izuku asks, swallowing his mouthful of tea. "Haruta he--Fury said he's a bad liar, and he'll know if he sees any of the three of us, so--" Izuku says, pausing with his mouth still open when Nezu raises a paw.

"Before we can determine exactly what it is we need to do," Nezu says, the calm, lighthearted tone to his voice relaxing Izuku slightly, "I need to get some more information from you. Namely, about Haruta's involvement with the Gekkeiju and his motives for working with them, if you know," Nezu says. Izuku blinks, nodding.

"Um, Haruta, he--he was taken during last year's summer training camp," Izuku says. "He said--he said that Ema wasn't home, so they got him then." Izuku swallows, staring down at his reflection in his tea, the liquid swishing and moving slightly with the shaking of Izuku's hands. "They threatened, um, to hurt Ema, if he didn't--if he didn't help."

"During the summer camp?" Aizawa asks, from beside Izuku. Izuku nods, jerkily, and Aizawa sighs, reaching up to run a hand through his hair. "Fuck, I should have--"

"It's not your fault," Nezu says, simply, and Izuku watches as Aizawa's gaze moves upwards, to Nezu.

"They live with foster parents," Aizawa says, his eyes still on Nezu. "If he was taken during the summer training camp, there was no reason for their foster parents not to notice that he'd gone missing, no reason for them not to report it." Aizawa shakes his head, staring down at his lap. "I spent more than enough time with those two. I should have noticed that something was wrong." He draws in a deep breath, looking up at Nezu. "I know it's not my fault, but that doesn't mean I couldn't have prevented it."

“Well,” Nezu says, shrugging. “Hindsight is twenty twenty, as they say.” Izuku doesn’t miss the way his smile slips, slightly. Izuku swallows. It isn’t logical, doesn’t make any sense, but Izuku can’t help but feel that this is at least partially his fault. He should have found a way to tell them sooner, a way to get Haruta out of the Gekkeiju’s grasp.

“He, um--he works with Fury a lot,” Izuku says, looking between Aizawa and Nezu as both of their gazes turn to face him. “Fury’s quirk, it lets him, um, he can make people feel a lot of pain or--or a lot of pleasure,” Izuku says, because even though he’s told Aizawa, Nezu doesn’t know, yet. Izuku grips his cup tighter. “He uses it to, um, to punish us,” Izuku says. He swallows. “And as a reward.” Izuku watches as Aizawa and Nezu exchange a glance.

“Fury’s the one in charge of discipline, I take it,” Aizawa says. Izuku nods.

“Even though I-I technically work under Miura, I report in to--to him, a lot,” Izuku says. “Oh, um, Miura, she’s Leadfoot. Sumire Miura.” Izuku watches Nezu blink and Aizawa startle, all at the same time. Before Izuku can ask, though, Nezu’s pulling out a phone and speaking.

“Well, I’d better get Yamauchi over here,” Nezu says, his fingers moving over the keys of his phone. He pauses, glancing up over it. “Yamauchi’s been talking about someone named Sumire nearly nonstop, but she failed to mention this person’s status as the villain Leadfoot.” Izuku blinks, watching as Aizawa sighs, blowing air out long and slow through his mouth. Izuku swallows, shifting uncomfortably. *I didn’t mean to give away something she was trying to keep secret.*

“We’ll be able to keep Ema and Haruta safe,” Aizawa says, catching Izuku looking at him. “If we move Haruta into the dorm alongside Ema, the Gekkeiju won’t be able to get to either of them.” Aizawa’s face is flat, but it shows no signs of doubt or fear. Izuku swallows.

“I-I don’t--if you do that now, they’re gonna know I told,” Izuku says, chewing on his lower lip. “They--they’re already suspicious of me, and--and they have ways to--they’re going to find out,” he says, shaking his head. He leans forward, setting his cup of tea down on the table before he spills it. His hands are shaking, hard, and Izuku is suddenly thinking about the smell of cigarettes, the burn of Fury’s hands on his skin.

“There’s no reason for you to go back if Haruta is safe,” Aizawa says, his brow furrowing. Izuku shakes his head again, wrapping his arms around himself.

“I-I can’t--I don’t know if they have more captives, if they’re going to hurt one of those--those kids, or if--if Miura’s going to be okay,” Izuku says. He presses his eyes shut for a moment. “Shinsou, too, they--they could go after him. I have to keep doing this.”

“Why does it have to be you?” Aizawa asks, his voice soft. Izuku’s eyes snap open to look at his teacher. Aizawa is staring at him with a soft look, almost bewildered as he watches Izuku. “Why do you have to be the one who does this? Why not a pro, someone with experience with infiltrations like this?” Aizawa’s lips press together. Izuku gives his head a tiny shake.

“I’m *already* doing this,” Izuku says, his voice a rush whisper thick with frustration. “I don’t--I’ve told you, I *want* to do this. I-I want to do--to do whatever it takes.” Izuku squeezes his hands into fists, feels his nails bite into the skin. “I’ve been doing this--I’ve been doing it alone for *months* already. I’d rather you help me do what I have to do than--than just waste your time trying to talk me out of it,” Izuku grits out, watching his knuckles go white from the pressure.

“Midoriya,” Aizawa says, his voice soft. Whatever he was going to say next, though, is cut off by a knock at the door. Izuku startles, flinching.

“Well, that was fast!” Nezu says, standing up and making his way over to the door. Izuku blinks, turning to watch as Nezu turns the handle and pulls the door open. On the other side is Ren, wearing a hoodie and jeans and standing on a pair of crutches. Her hair is in its customary long, neat braid, and she smiles when she sees Izuku.

“So, you told them who she was,” Ren says, walking into the room. She uses the crutches as she walks, and they make her footsteps into a strange rhythm. Izuku swallows.

“I’m--I’m sorry I didn’t realize that--” Izuku starts, but Ren cuts him off, shaking her head and chuckling under her breath.

“Don’t be sorry, I was gonna have to tell them eventually,” she says with a shrug. She hobbles over to the chair Nezu had been sitting in and plops down in it, leaning over and shifting her crutches so they lean up against the side of the chair. Nezu pushes the door shut and walks into the room.

“Tea, Yamauchi?” he asks. Ren looks over at him and shakes her head.

“I’m good, thanks,” she says, shifting her gaze back to Izuku. “So, what’s the situation?” she asks. Izuku blinks, surprised that she’d ask him, of all people.

“I-I told them the names of--of all of the lieutenants, and Sasaki,” Izuku says. “And I told them Miura’s name.” He glances over to Aizawa. “Her quirk is--she has telekinesis, but just of lead.” Aizawa nods.

“That’s consistent with previous reports,” Aizawa says. His eyes shift to Ren. “And what you told us about their quirks lines up with Yamauchi’s reports on the quirks she saw while in captivity. We didn’t have full names or this kind of detailed information on their hierarchy.”

“Sumire never told me much about the other members,” Ren says, sighing and leaning back in the chair, folding her arms over her chest. “We mostly talked about Kazuo and Manami, but even then, it wasn’t ever about their jobs in the Gekkeiju.” Izuku frowns.

“Because... because they’re dating? Fury and Miura?” Izuku asks. He ignores Aizawa and Nezu’s glances. Ren tips her head slightly.

“I’m surprised she told you,” Ren says, then shrugs. “Yeah, that, and they’ve known each other since they were kids.” She puffs out her cheeks, blowing out air. “I don’t have many details, she’s not exactly talkative. But the three of them have been living together since before the Gekkeiju existed, that’s for sure.” Izuku nods, thinking.

It makes sense that they’ve known each other since childhood, especially if Miura was only twelve when the Gekkeiju started. Izuku worries at his lower lip, chewing on the scab that’s formed over the place where he chewed through it earlier. *Of course Fury and Manami were together, Izuku thinks. They’re siblings. But why Miura?*

“The Gekkeiju formed about eight years ago,” Izuku says, looking up at Aizawa and Nezu. “Miura was twelve. I don’t--I think she might be a victim, too, at least partially.” He clenches his teeth together, presses his hands into fists. “I know she’s--she’s killed people, but I still--I still want to save her.”

“Sumire has saved my life twice, now,” Ren says. Izuku glances up at her, and her hazel eyes move to meet his, and she smiles just the tiniest bit. “If it wasn’t for her and Midoriya, Mouse and I would still be in that horrible, horrible basement.” She shifts her gaze, looking over to stare Nezu down. “I’m going to help him. If he gets hurt, I can take his injuries. I don’t mind bearing them

myself if that's what it takes."

"Well," Nezu says, sighing and shaking his head just the smallest bit. "I guess that's that, then," he says, shrugging. Izuku watches Aizawa turn to him, his dark eyes widening.

"You can't let them--" Aizawa starts, but Nezu interrupts him.

"Oh, I can," Nezu says. "I don't intend on sending our Midoriya back in there without support, mind you." He looks at Izuku, smiles. "Midoriya, how do you feel about having a team behind you? Top grade heroes, analysts, and medical staff, along with whatever you need to do what you have to do." Izuku opens his mouth, blinks.

"I... That would be amazing," he says. "But I'm--I'm just a vigilante, I--"

"You're not *just* anything, Midoriya," Nezu says, his eyes narrowing and his smile widening.

"You're the underground hero who's going to take down the Gekkeiju."

--

The next day, after classes, Izuku doesn't head back to his dorm room. He doesn't go to Nezu's office, like he's supposed to, and he doesn't go to see his mom, like he'd planned to. Instead, Izuku turns off of the path that leads from the classrooms to the dorms, his shoes sinking into the soft grass. He hears a noise of surprise from behind him, from Uraraka and Iida where they're walking along the path, and he turns back to give them a smile.

"I-I'm going to go for a walk in the woods," he says. "I just need to clear my head." Uraraka and Iida exchange a glance before looking back at him. Uraraka nods.

"Okay, but come back in time for dinner, okay?" she asks, tipping her head to the side and chewing at her lower lip. "You need to keep your strength up, since you're still healing."

"I'll be back, I promise," Izuku says, smiling and waving. Iida and Uraraka both return the gesture, and it's enough for Izuku to turn and keep walking across the lawn, the grass thick and green despite the chill in the air. Izuku can't believe how quickly the year is going by, how it's already the middle of October. He feels like the first year is running right by, like he's missing it in all of the time he's been spending fighting villains and getting kidnapped and running around as Ace.

Izuku breathes out, slow and even as he steps into the shade of the forest. The trees, dark and tall and lush with evergreen leaves, sway and whisper in the breeze, the smell of crisp cedar and clean pine filling the air. The ground underneath Izuku's feet changes from soft grass to slick, amber-colored pine needles and patches of fine sand. It reminds him of before the raid, of moonlit nights spent sneaking out to change into his costume so that he can run through the streets, so he can jump from roof to roof.

Izuku realizes, as he walks through the trees, weaving around patches of brambles and spots where the sun shines through the trees, letting grass and scratchy, scrabbly little bushes grow, that he hasn't killed himself in over a week. He thinks it's been that long, at least, but it might be more like two weeks, really. He hadn't killed himself since the raid over a week ago, at least, and that was a Monday.

Izuku pauses, standing in a patch of dappled, broken sunlight, golden and warm, when it clicks. *The last time I killed myself was when Aizawa was watching*. Izuku swallows, reaching his hands up, towards his face. He breathes in the earthy, sandy scent of the forest, the rich, damp smell of tree sap and pine needles, and he presses one hand to his neck, over the place where he'd cut

himself open, where he'd bled himself dry. His hand is cool, compared to the flesh of his neck, and he can feel the heat radiating out from his throat, can feel his pulse, steady and slow. Izuku leans his forehead on his other hand, pressing his face into his palm, and he lets his eyes slide shut.

Izuku breathes in, out. The leaves of the trees shift around him, a slithering, whispering wound. Birds chirp and chatter, far away in the distance. Izuku thinks he can even hear the sounds of laughter, of conversation and talking and giggles, from further away.

It's a strange thought, that he's gone so long without it. Now that he's thinking of it, he's itching for it. He wants to drive a blade into his throat, wants to cut out the fluttering little pulse under his skin, wants to spill red all over the forest floor, wants to pain the soft greens and browns in bright, angry red, but at the same time, he doesn't want to at all. Izuku doesn't want to feel pain, doesn't want to have to feel cold and shaky and sick. He knows, somewhere inside of himself, that it'll feel nice. He knows that he'll like it, knows that he's *going* to have to do it again, to turn back time or undo something he doesn't want to have happened.

Izuku opens his eyes and sits down on the ground, on a bed of soft, slick pine needles, shiny and red-brown. He sits with his knees up, his feet flat on the ground and his palms pressed into the cool ground. It smells earthier down here, and as Izuku stares at the ground, he can make out a line of ants crawling along the ground, carrying pieces of leaves on their backs. Izuku watches them as he breathes, taking in the air of the forest.

Izuku will probably have to kill himself again, will probably *want* to kill himself again, but right now, in this space and in this quiet calm, Izuku doesn't want to. Instead, Izuku leans his back against the thick trunk of an old, towering pine tree, and he leans back, staring up at the leaves, at the tiny flecks of blue sky that peek through the leaves. He sits there, and he just exists.

--

Izuku's lying facedown on his bed in his room when he hears a knock at the door. It's a quick, confident knock, but whoever it is on the other side of the door doesn't say anything, doesn't announce their presence, and they don't make any other noise, either. Izuku thinks he knows who it is, just from that, as he groans, pushing himself off of his bed and standing up, walking over to the door. He turns the lock, opening the door, and he sees that his guess was right--Neito is standing in the doorway, his hands in the pockets of his leather jacket.

"Hey," Neito says, the start of a smile climbing up his face. "How are you healing?" he asks, stepping into the room as Izuku steps aside, letting him in. Izuku watches as Neito shrugs off his jacket, draping it over Izuku's dresser.

"I'm doing good," Izuku says, tugging the door shut and turning the lock. He turns back to see Neito hopping up onto his bed, covering a yawn with one hand. "How are you?" Izuku asks. Neito blinks, looking up at him with a confused look in his blue eyes.

"Oh, I'm good," Neito says. His face settles, his eyes narrowed and his mouth neutral. "We need to talk, though." Izuku swallows. He'd been expecting this.

"Y-Yeah," Izuku says, walking the short distance across the room and sitting down on the edge of his bed, his legs sinking into the mattress. "We do."

"Give me one good reason why I shouldn't tell Aizawa and Nezu about your quirk," Neito says, his brows low and his eyes narrow. *He's angry*, Izuku thinks. He swallows, folding his hands together in his lap.

"I-I know who the traitor is," Izuku says. Neito blinks, frowning.

"Who?" Neito asks. Izuku shakes his head, slightly.

"Let me--let me finish," Izuku says. "I told--I told Nezu and Aizawa-sensei, though, and they're--they're working on getting them safe, and stuff." Izuku bites at his lower lip, and since Aizawa isn't here to scold him, he doesn't hesitate to pick off the scab with his teeth. "They're being forced, so we have to get them out safely."

"O...kay," Neito says, squinting. "I'm not really understanding why this is a reason that I shouldn't tell the teachers that you kill yourself as a fun evening activity." Neito rolls his eyes, shaking his head. "How many times have you even done it since you got back?"

"None," Izuku replies back, quietly. Neito blinks, looking at Izuku.

"Really?" he asks, his eyes slightly widened. Izuku nods.

"I haven't," Izuku says, looking down at his lap. "And the reason you can't tell Aizawa-sensei is because the traitor can read minds." Izuku sighs, letting his eyes squeeze shut. "If the--if the Gekkeiju figured out my actual quirk, they'd never let me go. They'd--they'd keep me locked up forever, until they figured out how to take my quirk." Izuku swallows, opening his eyes to stare blankly at his lap.

"Izuku, I don't know anything about the Gekkeiju," Neito says, sighing. "Aizawa only told me that you'd rescued someone from them, and Bakugou told me that you're the vigilante Ace." Neito pauses. "You're a spy, aren't you? For UA."

Izuku swallows. "Kind of," he says. "I, uh, started being Ace before I started here." Izuku shifts, twisting his hands together until it stings his skin. "I started--I pretended to join the Gekkeiju when they captured me, during the training camp. I've been spying on them ever since."

"But UA only just found out," Neito says, a sigh in his voice. "God, and to think I was giving you a hard time about being stressed. Fuck." Izuku glances up to see Neito frowning, his blonde brows drawn together. "Why didn't you say something?" Neito asks, twisting his mouth to the side. "Why didn't you ask someone for help?" Izuku sighs, leaning down and burying his face in his hands.

"I don't know," he says, his voice muffled. "I just--I don't know who I can trust, everything keeps getting complicated and hard and painful the more that people learn and I--I was doing fine before," he says. "It *sucks* but--but I'm alive, and I got Mouse and Ren out." Izuku shakes his head, feeling hot tears prickle up in his eyes. "I saved them," he says, his voice turning into a sob. "So why does it feel like I'm being punished? Why is everything so messed up?" Izuku chokes out, squeezing his hands into the flesh of his face, pressing harder and harder until his nails are clawing at his forehead, at the skin around his eyes.

"Izuku," Neito breathes, his voice full of pain. "You're--you're hurting yourself," he says, but Izuku jerks away from him when he feels soft fingers brush against his wrists. Izuku turns away from Neito, his hands still covering his face.

"It's always questions!" Izuku says, his voice a shout in the quiet room. "Everyone's been--been doing nothing but ask me things since--since I woke up. Why did I do *this*, why didn't I do *that*, what was I *thinking*, who was it, what did *they* do--and then Aizawa-sensei and Tsukauchi and you and my mom, everyone's trying to say what I *should* have done, what I *should* do!" Izuku's voice climbs higher and higher, and rips his hands away from his face, jumping off of the bed and

whirling around to face Neito, his hands balled in fists at his sides.

“I’m *tired!*” Izuku says, his voice cracking. “But I’ve been--I’ve been doing this right without anyone’s help for so much longer than anyone knows. I’ve--everything I’ve done, I’ve done it at least *twice*, Neito,” Izuku shakes his head, reaching up to press the heel of one hand into his forehead, his other hand reaching up to claw at his shirt, over where his heart is. “I know what I’m doing, and *I can’t die!* I wish people would stop telling me what to do and asking me stupid questions and just asked how they could help instead!” Izuku shouts, his voice thick with tears.

Izuku pauses, breathing heavily. Neito is staring at Izuku with wide-open blue eyes, his brows high on his forehead. His mouth is open slightly, and as Izuku stares at him, Neito blinks, breathing out slowly. He brings his arms up, folding them over his chest, his hands holding his biceps.

“I’m sorry, Izuku,” Neito says, his brows lowering and his eyes creasing. “I didn’t--I didn’t realize that--”

“Don’t apologize,” Izuku says, sighing. “It’s--I’m not mad at you, I just--I just took it out on you,” he says, reaching up to drag a hand down his face, something that he’s seen Aizawa do many times when he’s stressed. It works, kind of, but it doesn’t stop the bitter, worn-out feeling in Izuku’s skin, doesn’t stop the hard, fast guilt that burns in his chest. Neito blinks at him, his face relaxing into something neutral. His eyes are brilliant blue as he stares up at Izuku from where’s still sitting on the bed.

“How can I help?” Neito asks, tilting his head to the side slightly. Izuku stares at him, watches as his friend who he’d just yelled at for something he didn’t even do, his friend who’d seen him go missing, end up in the hospital, and been told practically *nothing* just... accepts what Izuku had said he needed, what Izuku asked for. Izuku feels tears build up in his eyes anew, feels that thick, choking sensation in his throat, and he bites at his lower lip to stop himself from dissolving into tears.

“C-Can you...” Izuku lifts his hands up, like he’s miming a hug, and Neito nods. He stands up and reaches forward, pulling Izuku into a warm, tight hug, and Izuku wraps his hands around Neito’s back gratefully, burying his head in Neito’s shoulder.

They stand there for a minute, with Izuku softly crying into Neito’s shirt, his hands balled into fists at Neito’s back. Neito clutches Izuku tight to him, like he’s afraid that Izuku will disappear if he lets go. *Maybe he is*, Izuku thinks as he hiccups. *I was in the hospital for a week. He was worried.* Izuku sighs, forcing his face to relax, and even though his breathing is still uneven with sobs, he can tell that he’s calming down.

“I’m sorry,” Izuku breathes, and he feels more than sees Neito shake his head. Neito is warm, and he smells like pine and brown sugar.

“If I’m not allowed to apologize, you aren’t either,” Neito says. His voice is a little tight, and Izuku wonder if he’s been crying, too. Izuku doesn’t want to move away to look, and he doesn’t want to ask. He owes Neito an explanation, even if he doesn’t want to have to work through every little detail, every little piece of the story.

“I have to go back tomorrow,” Izuku says, instead. “I’m still--there are still people I need to save.” He breathes in, out. One of Neito’s hands rubs up and down his back, and Neito tugs at them, leading Izuku over to the bed. Neito sits, and he tugs at Izuku until Izuku turns, sitting beside him. Neito loops one arm over his shoulders, and he tugs Izuku down until Izuku is lying on top of him. Neito stares down at Izuku, his eyes red around the edges, and Izuku is reminded of last time they sat like this, when Izuku was overdosing on sleeping pills. He wonders if Neito still has those.

“You don’t have to tell me anything you don’t want to,” Neito says, his lips pressed together, his eyes narrowed and tears gathering along his bottom lids. “But--but I want to help, if I can. Even if it’s just by listening.” Izuku blinks up at him.

“I... I don’t think I can tell you everything,” Izuku says, softly. “But when I--when I get back this weekend, I’ll tell you what I can.” He breathes out, long and slow.

“Okay,” Neito says. “Okay.” He swallows, his eyes shutting, a few tears squeezing out from the sides. “Don’t die,” he says as he opens them, a hint of laughter in his voice. He smiles.

“I might,” Izuku says, “but I’ll live.” He lets himself smile at that.

He and Neito stay together until curfew, playing cards and talking about stupid, easy things, like classwork and Vlad-sensei’s apparently terrible fashion sense. They talk until Aizawa knocks on the door to tell Neito to go back to his own room, and by the time Izuku goes to bed, he’s the kind of relaxed and worn out that only comes after a good cry and a good laugh.

Chapter End Notes

content warning: mentions of overdose, talk of torture

[discord!](#) [carrrd!](#)

i hope you enjoyed!!!! tbh i hate writing confrontation type scenes--they feel stressful and frustrating because that's how it is for izuku, but it's unpleasant for me. i'm really looking forward to writing some nice, relaxing torture and gore :D

lies

Chapter Summary

last time: izuku talks to nezu about the haruta sitch, goes for a walk, and vents to neito

Chapter Notes

hi gamers i had a headache for the past 4 days and then i finally convinced myself to take a decongestant today and wow what do you know it was a sinus headache pog at least i feel better now!!!!

drink water, eat smth, and take ur meds if u haven't yet before you read this chapter or izuku will never tell aizawa about his quirk (knife meoji but lovingly)

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Izuku swallows as he steps into the infirmary, his hands shaking as he buttons the sleeves of his dress shirt. The stiff, white fabric feels cool and slick under his fingers, and Izuku sighs as he finally gets the last button into its place.

“Izuku, there you are!” Inko says, making Izuku glance up. His mom walks up to him, wearing the blue scrubs of her work uniform. She has a nervous smile on her face, and Izuku can tell from the way her eyes and cheeks are red that she’s been crying. Izuku swallows, crossing his arms over his chest. He’s not chilly, but it feels more comfortable, like he’s hugging himself. Izuku glances past him mom, to where Aizawa is leaning against a wall, watching Izuku with his eyes half lidded and his hands shoved in his pockets. He’s wearing his hero costume, but his capture scarf is missing.

“H-Hi, mom,” Izuku says, because it would probably make his mom even more nervous if he didn’t reply. She stops in front of him, looking him up and down before reaching out. Izuku flinches back before he can stop himself. His mom pulls her hands back.

“Sorry, baby,” she says, her lower lip wobbling. Izuku opens his mouth to reply, but she keeps talking. “I should have asked first. There’s a string on the side of your shirt,” she says, gesturing to her own side, just above her hip. Izuku blinks, glancing down. She’s right--there’s a black thread, probably from his slacks. Izuku pulls it off, flicking it onto the floor.

“How are you feeling?” Inko asks, watching Izuku. Izuku blinks. She doesn’t seem to be upset by him flinching any more, but he’s still stuck on that. He’d flinched away from his own *mom*, who’d never done a single thing to hurt him. Just last night, he’d been fine hugging Neito and resting his head on his lap, so why is he jumpy now? It doesn’t make any sense.

“O-Okay,” Izuku says, wiping his hands on the front of his pants. “I mostly just--just want to get this over with,” he admits. His mom nods, chewing on her bottom lip. Izuku supposes he probably got the habit from her in the first place.

“Let’s get you ready then, okay?” Inko says, giving him a smile. She turns to Aizawa, who gives a

quick nod before pushing himself off of the wall he's been leaning against. He takes a few steps towards them.

"I've got the wire for you," Aizawa says, reaching into his pocket and pulling out a small black case, about the size of a pill case. "You can slide it into the hem of your shirt or your pants, and it doesn't contain any lead, so Leadfoot shouldn't be able to do anything with it." He holds the case out, and Izuku takes it, opening it. There's a thin, silver wire inside, with a small black lump in the center of it. Izuku can't for the life of him imagine how this is both a microphone and some kind of transmission device, but he's not going to question it. He tugs at his shirt with one hand, untucking the center of it, and he slides the wire through the fabric like a needle. It slips easily into the hem of his shirt, and when he tucks the fabric back in, it's like there's nothing at all.

"They're not--there's no way for them to notice it, right?" Izuku asks, swallows. Aizawa shakes his head.

"They won't," Aizawa says. "This is the most advanced piece of equipment we have for missions like this, and it hasn't gotten anyone caught before," he says. His eyes turn to the side, and Izuku follows his gaze to the black duffel bag sitting on one of the infirmary chairs. Inko walks over to it, picking it up and carrying it over to Izuku with a smile on her face.

"Here you go," she says, passing the bag to him. "You've got a change of clothes, a first aid kit, and some food and water." Izuku takes the bag with a nod. It's a little heavier than usual, but not by much. His mom chews on her lower lip. "I wish you didn't have to go," she says, her voice soft. Izuku nods.

"I know," he says. "I've done this before." Inko's frown deepens. Izuku swallows, but he doesn't know what to say to make her feel better. Aizawa sighs.

"Be careful," Aizawa says, and Izuku looks up to meet his gaze. "Don't take unnecessary risks, and if you're in enough danger to be able to activate your quirk, get out of there *immediately* ." His lips press into a dark line. "The wire only helps if we have time to send an extraction team. The Gekkeiju do not hesitate. Understood?" Aizawa's voice is clipped, tight. Izuku knows that it's the teacher's way of being worried without showing it in teary eyes like his mom. Izuku nods.

"Okay," Izuku says. "I-I'll be careful." He doesn't have any intention of running if things get deadly, but the wire essentially protects him from being captured--he could give a location, ask for help, or at the very least, they'd know his status. Izuku thinks it's almost funny, that he's more afraid of being kidnapped than he is of dying, but he supposes death has a unique meaning to him.

"Izuku," Inko says, and Izuku looks over to her, watching her dab at her eyes with a tissue. "I, um, I have a surprise for you when you get back," she snuffles.

"You--you do?" Izuku asks, blinking. Inko nods, smiling slightly.

"It's a g-good surprise, I swear!" she says, laughing a little. "I'll--I'll see you soon?" she asks, hopeful. Izuku swallows, nodding. He returns his mother's smile.

"Soon," he says, hoping that it's not a lie

--

Izuku is shivering by the time he's reached the front door of the Gekkeiju base. The formal shirt is made of sturdy, quality fabric, but it doesn't keep out the chill of the wind, doesn't stop it from covering his skin with goosebumps. *At least the train was warm*, he thinks to himself as he

hesitates in front of the mirrored glass door. He can see his own reflection, can see the way his eyes look haunted, the way that his hair looks almost black in the grey light of a cloudy day. It's the same kind of weather that it'd been the day of the rescue.

Izuku pushes the door open, and he almost freezes again when he sees Yamamoto standing behind the desk, but he manages to catch himself in time. Yamamoto doesn't look any different than normal, her thick black hair half up, half down and her clothing a neatly pressed suit. She doesn't glance up at him, but Izuku knows she noticed him enter because she starts to type on the computer.

"The boss, this time," she says, her voice almost apologetic. "Top floor. First door to the left." Izuku nods, his breathing picking up slightly. He remembers, vaguely, that he'd been in at least two rooms on the seventh floor, way back when he was here as a prisoner. He supposes that he might as well be a prisoner now, too.

"T-Thanks," Izuku says, turning and walking towards the elevators. He doesn't look back at Yamamoto, but he wants to. He wants to examine her head, to try and see if he'd left a bruise or a scar with the knife he'd knocked her out with. He wants to know if she saw him, before he hit her. She must not have remembered, if she did. Izuku doesn't think that even Sasaki would be so bold as to have him walk himself to his own execution.

Izuku stops in front of the elevators and breathes in, out. He presses the call button, steeling himself as the elevator doors open almost immediately. He steps inside, presses the button for the seventh floor, and waits. Izuku folds his arms over his chest, tapping out a rhythm on the skin of his biceps with his fingers, trying to focus on that and not the way that he's mostly certainly headed up to his death. He wonders how sensitive the wire is, if Aizawa and Nezu and whoever else is listening can hear the sounds of the elevator or if it's just going to pick up the talking. Izuku wonders if he makes any noises, when Fury uses his quirk on him. Izuku hopes, briefly, that his mom isn't one of the people listening.

The elevator dings happily, like it doesn't know that it's delivering Izuku onto the doorsteps of hell. Izuku swallows, stepping off of the elevator onto the seventh floor. He'd forgotten how different that it looked from the rest of the building, the reddish wood floors covered with potted plants and the slate grey walls lined with elegant paintings, landscapes and still lifes and portraits. Izuku takes a breath, headed for the first door on the left. He can't be completely certain, but he thinks this is the room he was taken to the very first time he met Sasaki, back before he knew anything about the Gekkeiju, really. It feels surreal to be returning here, like this.

Izuku knocks once, and the doorknob is turning almost instantly. He steps back, away from Sasaki where she stands in the doorway. She's taller than Izuku by a good few inches, but the curled, golden-brown horns on her head and the tops of her black and gold wings add extra height to her. She's wearing a tight black turtleneck sweater and a skirt that falls to just below her knees, with a slit up the side. She's smiling wide enough that her glowing, acid-green eyes are pressed into crescents by her grin. Izuku swallows as she steps back, gesturing at the interior of the room.

"Come in," she says, her voice almost a purr. The room is familiar-looking, as Izuku steps inside. There's a leather couch facing the door, a coffee table, and an ottoman, where he remembers sitting, last time. The walls on either side are lined with bookshelves, and the back wall, behind the couch, is a floor-to-ceiling window. Izuku steps inside, standing beside the ottoman. Sasaki shuts the door but doesn't lock it, turning and walking into the room. As she moves to sit on the couch, Izuku examines her wings. He wonders if she can fly with them--they don't look nearly big enough to support a human's weight if they're not powered by a quirk.

“Sit,” Sasaki says, and Izuku knows well enough by now not to argue. He sits on the edge of the ottoman, putting his hands in his lap and letting his fingers curl into his palms as he forms loose fists. Sasaki sits leisurely, leaning back against the couch, with her legs crossed. She watches Izuku through narrowed eyes, a lazy smile creeping up the edges of her lips, and slowly, her tongue moves over her top lip. Izuku shudders.

“You know,” Sasaki says, tipping her head to the side slightly, “I am many things, Midoriya, but I am not stupid.” She says it slowly, casually. Her hand comes up, and she rests her cheek on it, her black, bobbed hair falling away from her face. Izuku thinks she’s waiting for something, but he has no idea what, and it makes his skin crawl.

“What did you think was going to happen?” she asks, her smile growing wider. She giggles lightly, under her breath. “I mean, come on. How long did it even take for you to go running to the *heroes*?” she spits the word out like it’s toxic, like it’s a slur. “Was it the first time that Kazuo punished you? Or did you wait until you met Mouse, decided that you’d feed your own hero complex?” Sasaki sighs, her smile slipping into a pout. “I’m disappointed, really. I thought you were stronger than that.”

Izuku takes a deep breath. “I didn’t tell anyone,” he says. He meets Sasaki’s gaze, watches as her eyebrows climb high on her face, as her lips turn up in a grin.

“Oh, you didn’t?” she asks, chuckling. “Well, I suppose you would say that,” she says, rolling her eyes, still smiling. “You did just get rid of our lie detector, after all.” Her eyes narrow. “Too bad we’ve got alternatives,” she says, reaching into a pocket in her skirt and taking out a phone. She flips it open smoothly, dialing a number without even looking away from Izuku’s face. He can hear the phone ring once before the ringing cuts off quickly.

“Yes?” Fury’s voice says from the other end of the phone. It’s hard to hear with the distortion of the phone, but he definitely sounds a little different than usual, than how he talks to Izuku. It’s almost like he’s nervous, but nerves and Fury just don’t make sense, so Izuku pushes it out of his mind.

“Kazuo, go ahead and bring Sumire and Haruta up for me, please,” Sasaki says, looking up at Izuku and grinning. “Midoriya is waiting.” Izuku swallows.

“On my way up,” Fury replies from the other end of the phone. Izuku expects him to hang up, then, but he doesn’t. Izuku realizes that he’s waiting for Sasaki to say something, to give him permission. Izuku swallows.

“Good,” Sasaki purrs. “Bye, Kaz,” she says, and she snaps the phone shut. She tips her head at Izuku. “You and Kazuo work together a lot, don’t you?” Sasaki asks. Izuku swallows.

“He, um, he--he takes my reports a lot, y-yeah,” Izuku says. His mouth feels too dry, his tongue too stiff. Izuku wants to run, wants to hide in a bathroom, wants to be able to shake and pull at his hair. He doesn’t. He can’t risk messing this up, not now. He doesn’t want to have to die if he can help it.

“I can tell,” Sasaki says, huffing out a laugh. She sighs, the air blowing a strand of her dark hair up and to the side. She grins, leaning forward. “You know, when I first brought Haruta here, he was like you. Strong. Brave. He’d been through a lot, you know, been bullied a bunch and all of that.” She shrugs, smiling slightly, but it doesn’t reach her eyes. “He still had this idea that the world would be fair to him, that things would get better.” Her grin widens. “I hope you’re not naive enough to believe that any more.” Izuku feels a pit open in his chest.

"I'm not," Izuku says, his voice quiet. Sasaki grins wider, crinkling the edge of her eyes slightly.

"Good," she says, her voice low and sweet. She opens her mouth to say something else, but there's a quick knock at the door. Izuku flinches, hard, but Sasaki doesn't even blink.

"Come in," she calls, her green, goat-like eyes flicking up to look at the door behind Izuku. Izuku swallows, turning to watch as the door opens. Izuku's hands are shaking slightly where he puts them in his lap, wringing them together as Fury steps into the doorway. He's wearing his usual dark shades, and behind him, Izuku can see Haruta staring at the ground, his eyes rimmed with red and the bags under his eyes bruised dark. He's shaking, and his forehead is covered in a thin sheen of sweat, but he smiles just the tiniest bit when he looks up and meets Izuku's gaze.

"Long time no see," Fury says, his voice a low hiss as he glares at Izuku through the glasses. That open aggression is almost reassuring--Izuku's not sure he could handle Fury doing that thing where he tries to say he's helping Izuku, not right now. Izuku doesn't reply, just looks behind Fury, at Miura. She walks in behind Haruta, her face covered in a myriad of yellowing bruises.

Her nose is clearly broken, and there's a nasty ring of bruises around her right eye, but the nastiest of her injuries are a series of cigarette burns going up and down both of her arms. They're half healed, old enough that Izuku would bet anything that Ren had given them to her, that they'd originally been part of the torture that Fury inflicted on her. Izuku swallows as he takes in Miura's limp and the bandage wrapped around her right ankle. The bands wrapped around her leg are glowing whenever she puts weight on that side, and Izuku can tell she's hurting. She doesn't meet his eyes as she walks into the room, moving to sit on the edge of the ottoman and stare at the floor.

"Sit on the floor," Fury snaps at Haruta, shoving out an elbow that clips Haruta in the side. Haruta flinches, but he doesn't reply, dropping to his knees and sitting with his hands in his lap on the ground between the coffee table and the wall. Fury steps around him, looking disgusted, and leans himself up against the bookshelf, his face angled towards Sasaki.

"Well, now that we're all here," Sasaki says, leaning forward and folding her hands together in front of her. "Why don't I ask you a few questions, and we'll have Haruta tell us if your words match your thoughts, hm?" Her eyes slide to the side, to look at Haruta, where he's sitting on the floor, trembling. He nods, his ears twitching and his long, grey hair falling in his face. Izuku swallows. *He's already been tortured today*, he thinks.

If Haruta can hear Izuku's thoughts, he doesn't give any sign of it. Izuku swallows, turning to look at Sasaki, who's watching the two of them with intent interest, her eyes half lidded and her lips curled up into a devious grin. Izuku feels his heart thud in his chest.

"I don't hear any protests, so I'll take that as a yes," Sasaki says, chuckling. "Now, Midoriya, did you tell Ms. Joke where the tower is and who we had staying in the basement?" She tips her head to the side. "Tell the truth, now," she says, sing-song and cheerful. Izuku breathes.

"I didn't tell her anything," Izuku says. "I've--I've never even spoken to her." It's the truth, too, which makes it convenient. He sees Haruta glance up at him, blinking owlishly with tired, tear-stained blue eyes.

"He's not lying," Haruta says. Sasaki hums, sounding unfazed.

"Okay," she says, shrugging. She doesn't even glance at Haruta. "Did you betray the Gekkeiju?" Sasaki tips her head to the side, and Izuku can't help the swell of dread in his stomach, can't help the way that he thinks that he's going to have to lie, that he's going to be in pain for this and that it's going to suck. Izuku swallows. He knows that Haruta can hear what he's thinking, can hear

what's going through Izuku's head, but Izuku can't stop himself from thinking. Maybe if he'd been less nervous, less tired, he'd be able to aim his thoughts in another direction, but he can't help it.

"N-No," Izuku says, anyway. Sasaki glances to the side, at Haruta. Izuku follows her gaze down, watches as Haruta reaches up, running a hand through his long hair.

"H-He's telling--telling the truth," Haruta says. Izuku sighs, letting his eyes slide shut. Izuku doesn't need to wait for the next part to know that there's a clear difference in how Haruta responded to the first go through and how he sounds now. Izuku opens his eyes to see Fury leaning down, Haruta shrinking to the side, away from him.

"Haruta," Fury says, voice low and rough. He kicks a leg out, and Izuku watches the toes of his shoes dig into Haruta's spine. "You're a fucking awful liar, you know that?" Fury laughs, and Izuku winces as he watches Fury lean down and grab a handful of Haruta's fine hair and yank on it, pulling him up. Haruta squeaks in pain, but he doesn't move his hands up to try and free himself. He just lets Fury tug him up without a protest.

"You really do have him trained perfectly," Sasaki says, laughing wonderingly. "I'm impressed! But," she says, sighing and shrugging, "that does mean that Midoriya isn't trained quite as well as we had hoped." Izuku swallows and Sasaki's gaze slides over to him. "Too bad."

"It wasn't him," Miura snaps from where she's sitting. Her voice is hoarse, like her throat is swollen. "He's not skilled enough to run that kind of break-in without more information, and he doesn't have enough information to have done that with his skill level." Miura sighs, reaching up to push her hair out of her face. Izuku can see that swelling on one of her knuckles, can see the bruising.

Sasaki hums. "I don't know," she says, reaching up and tapping the side of her cheek. "He could have done something else, even if it wasn't the break-in. Haruta heard something, didn't he?" She shrugs, smiling wide.

"Oi," Fury says, kicking Haruta again. "Tell me what he thought, or you're staying with me tonight." Izuku chews at his bottom lip, glancing over to Haruta, who's started to shake, harder. His pupils are blown wide and he shakes his head, even though Fury is still holding him by the hair. Haruta hangs limp, like a ragdoll.

"He's--he's--he's--" Haruta's voice cracks and breaks, and Fury drops him to the group.

"Useless," Fury spits, kicking Haruta, hard. Izuku winces. Haruta's hands come out, bracing himself against the ground. Izuku watches as Fury crouches down, squatting and putting a hand on Haruta's shoulder.

"Haruta," Fury says, voice low. "Why are you protecting him? The only thing that Izuku's ever done is get you hurt." Izuku swallows, watching as Fury reaches out, pulling a strand of Haruta's hair away from his face. Haruta's eyes shut, his lips parting and a bead of sweat rolling down his face. Haruta shakes his head, just the tiniest bit.

"I-I can't," Haruta says. "I'm not gonna--I'm not going to--to--" Haruta shakes his head again. Fury sighs.

"If you at least give me a hint, I'll let you pick," Fury says, his hand reaching out and grabbing a fistful of Haruta's hair again, tugging his head back. Izuku watches Fury whisper something into Haruta's ear, but Izuku can't make out the words. He sees Haruta's ears flatten back against his head, watches Haruta's big blue eyes squeeze shut as he curls in on himself. His voice is weak and

quiet when he speaks.

“He--he did something to do with--to do with the break-in,” Haruta whimpers. “Please, Fury, don’t make me--I don’t want to stay here, *please*,” Haruta begs. Izuku feels his heart ache for Haruta. *I’ve got to find a way to do this that doesn’t end with him in pain*, Izuku thinks. *I can’t do this to him again*. Izuku sees Haruta freeze, looking up at Izuku. His eyes are swollen with tears, but Izuku can still make out the confusion in his gaze.

It’s okay, Izuku thinks. *You can tell them*. He tries not to think about the fact that it won’t matter that he dies, but he can’t keep it out of his mind, not with how hard he’s trying *not* to think about it. Haruta stares at him, shakes his head. Izuku breathes.

“It was me,” Izuku says, turning to look at Sasaki. He sure hopes that the heroes don’t get here in time to save him, because this risk could end with someone dead for real if Izuku isn’t the one to die. Sasaki blinks, arching an eyebrow.

“I didn’t expect that one, certainly,” she says, shrugging. She isn’t smiling, her mouth flat and her eyes narrowed in what looks like cold, calculating anger. “Did you really think you’d get away with it?” she asks, tipping her head to the side.

“Not really,” Izuku says. *Not the first time through*, he thinks. Haruta is shaking his head, reaching his hands up to scratch at his face. Izuku wishes he could comfort the other boy, but he can’t. He turns away from Haruta, resigning himself to focus on getting as much information out of Sasaki as possible this reset.

“Did you think this was a game?” Sasaki asks, her voice almost a snarl as her lip curls revealing her too-sharp teeth. She stands from the couch, her wings flaring out at her sides. Izuku registers Miura going stiff as a board beside him, registers Fury taking a step back. *She’s really angry*.

“I-I honestly don’t--I don’t really know *what* this is,” Izuku stammers, biting at his bottom lip but forcing himself to keep his eyes on Sasaki. “I don’t have--I don’t have any idea what you’re trying to do or--or why,” he says. He swallows as Sasaki narrows her eyes at him, staring for just a moment before she tips her head back and starts to laugh, a loud, unhinged sound.

“Oh, you’re just--” she starts, leaning forward and shaking her head. Her green eyes glow as she grins. “You’re really something, huh? A real *idiot*, but a smart one,” she says, miming wiping tears away from her eyes as she straightens up. Her gaze darts to the side, and Fury and then Miura in turn. “Heel,” she says, raising one hand and snapping her fingers. Izuku blinks, watching as both Fury and Miura react. Fury shifts from his squatting position, kneeling with his head bowed. Miura slides off of the ottoman and does the same. Neither of them look afraid, neither of them are shaking, but Izuku can feel the tension thick in the air. He can see that Miura is clenching her teeth together hard enough that the muscle in her temple strains and swells.

“Midoriya,” Sasaki says, raising both her hands and holding them out at him. “How about I show you something pretty before you die?” she asks, grinning and laughing.

Izuku feels, suddenly, a ringing in his ears and a burst of sharp, hot pain in his shoulder. He turns his head, eyes widening in horror as he takes in the bleeding gunshot wound in his shoulder, straight through the bone, going all the way through to his back. Izuku vaguely recognizes the sound of someone screaming, but when he reaches up a hand to cover his mouth, it isn’t him. He clenches the hand over his shoulder instead, trying to stem the bleeding, and as he glances around the room, Haruta, Fury, and Miura are all bleeding from the same wound, placed in exactly the same spot. Haruta is crying, screaming, but Miura and Fury haven’t even flinched.

“My quirk is *amazing*,” Sasaki says, giggling as she wraps her arms around her chest. “It can do *so much*, Midoriya, but it’s also so *limited*,” she says. She leans forward towards him, her acid-green eyes wide and her grin stretching high on her face. “Do you know what’s one thing I *can’t* do? What’d the one thing I’ll never get to experience, the one thing my quirk can’t *share* with a person?”

Izuku shakes his head. “I-I don’t--what are you--are you doing?” he grits out. He doesn’t understand, doesn’t get why she’d hurt Miura and Fury, too, doesn’t get what she’s trying to show him.

Just as suddenly as it came on, the pain in his shoulder and the ringing in his ears is gone. Izuku blinks, turning to stare at his shoulder. There is no wound there, no blood. Haruta is still whimpering, still crying and holding himself, but the wounds on all of the others are gone, too. Izuku glances up at Sasaki, sees her staring down at him with a soft, sad expression on her face.

“My quirk can’t kill anyone directly,” Sasaki says. She reaches up a hand, pressing it to the side of her face. “I can make people feel anything I’ve felt, give them any physical condition I’ve had, but I can’t give them memories, and I can’t make anything permanent,” she says, looking at Izuku. Her smile grows. “That’s all I’ve ever wanted, you know. To be able to share.”

“To share d-death,” Izuku breathes, his mind racing. *She can’t know anything about my quirk*, his traitorous mind thinks. He can only hope that Haruta isn’t coherent enough to share anything he hears.

“Oh, that would be nice, sure,” Sasaki says, dropping her hands to her side and shrugging. “But I think it’d be nice to be able to share memories, experiences. To bottle them up and sell them, you know?” She smiles, sighing like she’s just relaxed into a chair, like she’s relieved. “Of course, the beautiful thing about our society is that with the right combination of quirks, anything is possible.” She leans forward, her green eyes narrowing. “Isn’t it?” she purrs, her tongue lathing over her sharp teeth as she steps up, onto the coffee table.

Izuku realizes what’s happening, and he instinctively starts to scramble back, even though he’s already resigned himself to dying this round. He swallows thickly, bracing himself as Sasaki wraps a hand around his throat. She holds it there gently for a moment, before she reaches up the other hand as she steps off of the coffee table, practically straddling Izuku on the ottoman. As her hands squeeze tight, restricting Izuku’s breathing and making his vision dot with black stars, making his head ache with pressure, she leans in. Her breath is warm on Izuku’s cheek as she strangles him.

“A shame,” she says, her voice soft, smooth. “I would have loved to experience your quirk firsthand. Unfortunately, seeing the future isn’t good enough for me to keep you around after this.” Her hands dig in tighter, and Izuku can tell he only has a few moments before he blacks out. He can hear the strange sounding, wheezing gasps that leak out from his mouth as she chokes him out.

“Goodbye, Midoriya,” Sasaki whispers. “Sweet dreams.”

Izuku lets himself relax, lets his body go limp. He wonders how far away the heroes are, if they’ll get to see him before time turns back. He doesn’t think so, judging by the way that his quirk is already grabbing hold of him and tugging him back through time as the world fades away into nothing. Izuku welcomes it.

content warning: torture, strangulation

[discord!](#) [carrd!](#)

i hope you enjoyed!!! god i'd missed writing this type of scene, so fun to write. im v tired so short a/n but i wanted to say that the comments lately have been making me so happy i love yall you're so sweet to me :D

memory

Chapter Summary

last time: izuku goes back to the tower. he lies, haruta does a bad job of agreeing with him, and he gets crazy murdered

Chapter Notes

hi gamerz tomorrow is gonna be BUCK WILD i have an exam i didn't study for wish me luck <3

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

When Izuku opens his eyes to his own reflection in the mirrored glass outside the Gekkeiju tower, he can't but feel a hit of disappointment. He's thought for a while that his quirk sets him back to where he last felt safe, but he kind of wishes it could have at least sent him back after the part where he has to take the elevator up. Izuku swallows, pulling the door open and stepping inside the tower.

It's identical to the first time through, although Izuku doesn't technically need to wait for Yamamoto's instructions this time. He pretends he does, anyway, because there's no good reason for him to know where to walk. Yamamoto types on the keyboard, the clicking of the keys filling the quiet of the first floor lobby.

"The boss, this time," she says, her voice still sounding strangle sad, like she feels bad for him. "Top floor. First door to the left."

Izuku nods. "Thanks," he says, turning and walking towards the elevator. He wonders if, with enough resets, he'll stop being afraid of the elevators. Exposure therapy, or something like that. *If I want to make it through this reset, I'd better come up with a plan, and fast*, he thinks to himself as he presses the button to call the elevator down to the first floor. Just like before, it opens immediately, and Izuku steps onto it with a slow exhale.

Izuku presses the button for the seventh floor and considers his choices. It's like that, regardless of what he does, Sasaki is going to bring Haruta, Fury, and Miura in. Izuku can't get away with lying, no matter how good he is at it, unless *Haruta* does a better job. Izuku almost cringes, thinking about the way that Haruta had stuttered and shook through his lie last time. Izuku wonders if any amount of coaching would be enough to get him to lie smoothly.

Is it even possible to lie without thinking about it? Izuku wonders as the elevator chimes softly, announcing his arrival on the seventh floor. Izuku takes in a slow breath, stepping off of the elevator and onto the polished wooden floor. Izuku listens to the soft whirring sound of the elevator doors sliding shut behind him, and he takes the moment to steady his thoughts, to calm himself down. *I have to manage to get Sasaki's trust back before Haruta comes in*. It's the only way. If Izuku can make her inclined to trust him from the get-go, she's less likely to distrust him, less likely to use Haruta as much. Izuku hopes that's the case, anyway.

Izuku walks to the door of the room, knocking on the door twice. His knock is stronger, this time, and he knows to expect Sasaki to tell him to come in, so he's already turning the knob when she does.

"Come in," she says, and Izuku opens the door, coming face to face with Sasaki. Izuku does his best to look like he isn't nervous about this, like he has nothing to be nervous about. He doesn't smile, just looks up and meets Sasaki's too-bright green eyes, watches her as she steps back with a grin, letting him into the room. Izuku moves to the ottoman, taking a seat as Sasaki does the same on the other side of the room. Sasaki settles with her legs crossed and her hands folded together in front of her, regarding Izuku with half-lidded eyes and a grin that makes Izuku have to hold back a shiver.

"You know," Sasaki says, tipping her head to the side slightly, "I am many things, Midoriya, but I am not stupid." Just like before, her hand comes up, and she rests her cheek on it, her black, bobbed hair falling away from her face. Izuku watches the way it falls away from her horns, the way that a few strands get caught on the brown material.

"You're not," Izuku agrees. He concentrates on breathing normally, evenly, and he hopes that it'll be enough to keep him calm. Sasaki smiles wider, her eyes squeezing almost shut.

"You're cute," Sasaki says, "but not cute enough to excuse treachery. How long did you think that your little trick would go unnoticed, hm?" She drops her hand to her lap, leaning forward. "Have you been a spy since the very beginning? Or was it something you were convinced to do? Maybe someone offered you money, power, *safety* ." Izuku swallows.

"I'm not the spy," Izuku says, his voice far calmer than his mind. Sasaki raises an eyebrow, her smile dropping.

"Oh, I'd say that too, if I was the spy," she says, shrugging. Her smile starts to creep back up her face. "I wonder if telling the heroes about Mouse was a tactical decision to rob us of our lie detector, or if you're just convinced that every wretched person needs to be saved." Izuku blinks, then tips his head to the side.

"But I didn't tell anyone about Mouse," he says, keeping himself calm and collected. "What makes you--makes you think it was me?" Izuku watches, trying to keep his face blank as Sasaki's eyes narrow, as she grins.

"You're not just cute," she says, slowly. "You're clever, too." She leans forward, reaching her arms out to press her palms into the surface of the coffee table, her green eyes fixed on Izuku's face. "Tell me, Midoriya. How do you like Kazuo's Hell?" Sasaki grins wide, showing her fangs. Izuku swallows, trying to shove down the thudding of his heart in his chest.

"I-I--I'm not a fan," he says. His mouth is dry, and it's making it hard for him to speak clearly. Sasaki laughs, a light, huffing sound, and her tongue pokes out, licking along the edges of her teeth.

"Have you ever wondered how it might feel if he was under the effects of Manami's quirk? Her power amplifies more than just *feelings* , you know," Sasaki says, reaching one hand up to tuck a loose strand of black hair behind one of her ears. "What if he was on trigger? Do you know how *that* would feel?" she asks, her voice growing in volume, like she's shouting, but she's still grinning, and it's unnerving to Izuku. Izuku shakes his head.

"I don't--I don't even know what trigger *is* ," he says. Sasaki blinks, seemingly surprised, and then she leans back, laughing as her head tips back to look up at the ceiling.

“Oh, that’s great!” she says, leaning forward, her eyes wide and her smile wider. “I forgot that it’s not common knowledge, silly me,” she says, standing up. Izuku can’t help the way he flinches back, away from her, but Sasaki doesn’t move over to him. Instead, she moves to one of the bookshelves, the one that makes up the wall to Izuku’s right. She glances over the books for a moment before pulling something out. It looks like a small, black case, made of polished and painted wood. She takes it out, holding it carefully, and she sets it on the coffee table before sitting back down and opening it. The lid of the case blocks Izuku’s view for a moment, but Sasaki turns it around, so Izuku can see.

“This is how those boys over at the Shie Hasssaikai were able to get so much stronger without any real work,” Sasaki says, running her fingers along the edge of the lid, her eyes half lidded and her long, dark lashes angled down. Izuku stares at the case, which contains two vials of clear fluid, a set of what looks like syringes, in the kind of papery packaging that comes on sterile medical supplies, and a set of alcohol wipes. Izuku blinks, unsure of how to react when Sasaki turns the case back around, leaning forward and taking something from the inside.

“I know the form is a little different,” Sasaki says, taking one of the vials and setting it on the table. “But the drug is the same,” she says, and Izuku watches as she takes a single syringe from the case. She rips the packaging open, then takes out two pieces, a syringe and a needle in a thin, pink plastic case. Izuku watches as she screws the needle into the syringe, humming under her breath. Izuku swallows, feeling a bead of sweat roll down his back. Sasaki looks up at him, blinks, then smiles, shaking her head.

“Oh, relax,” she says, setting the syringe down on the table. She reaches into the box, taking out an alcohol pad, and she rips it open. “I’m not going to use it on *you*. I’m just demonstrating.” She swipes the alcohol pad over the top of the vial, then sets it aside. She picks up the syringe, uncapping the needle. The scent of alcohol sends a shiver up Izuku’s spine as Sasaki stabs the needle through the top of the vial, into the liquid. It’s a small, thin syringe, and Izuku watches as Sasaki carefully, slowly pulls up liquid before pulling the needle from the vial. She holds it up, sticking her tongue out as if in concentration, then flicks the side of the syringe a few times. Izuku’s seen stuff like this before, when he was at the hospital or when he was watching medical dramas on TV, but there’s something sinister about the way Sasaki does it. Izuku watches as she recaps the needle, setting the syringe on the table.

“Do you have any requests?” Sasaki asks, rolling up her sleeve. “It can only be things I’ve experienced, of course.” She reaches into the case, pulling out another alcohol pad. She rips it open, discarding the package on the table, and rubs it into the skin of her bicep. She’s muscular, on par with Aizawa and Mirko, and Izuku wonders if he’d be able to take her in a quirkless fight. *Probably not*, he thinks. Sasaki picks up the syringe.

“You can’t share memories or--or make anything permanent,” Izuku says. “It’s just--it’s just the sensations and stuff,” he says. It sounds like he’s trying to reassure himself, rather than asking. Sasaki doesn’t glance up at him, uncapping the needle.

“Oh, that’s how my quirk behaves *normally*,” she says, a hint of amusement in her voice. “This stuff, though, is quite powerful.” Izuku swallows as she slides the needle into her muscle. She doesn’t react, not in the slightest. “Even at lower doses than the field versions, it’s really very impressive.” Izuku swallows as she slowly depresses the plunger, injecting herself with the liquid in the syringe. She pulls the needle out of her arm and puts the cap back on over the needle before setting it down on the table.

At first, Izuku thinks that nothing is happening, at least not anything visible. Sasaki seems normal, calm except for the grin on her face, as she looks up and meets Izuku’s eyes. Then, Izuku watches

as she starts to change. Her horns seem to grow, twisting and curling in a tight coil, and her wings twitch and shake. Izuku can see her canine teeth lengthening, growing sharper, and he watches as her eyes glow brighter, almost like they're flashlights or LEDs. Izuku scoots back as far as he dares on the ottoman when she stands up, towering over him. Her height is impressive normally, but with the way that her wings are larger, fuller, and the enhancement of her animal characteristics, she's an entirely new level of terrifying. She laughs a loud, booming laugh, the volume almost unnatural.

"Afraid?" she asks, and there's a rumbling, rough quality to her voice. It's like she's purring, like her throat is vibrating. Izuku swallows.

"A little," he admits, and it makes Sasaki's grin curl even wider. She licks her lips, her tongue barely reaching past her fangs.

"I have to be careful with this stuff, of course," she says, holding a hand out and examining it. It doesn't look any different to Izuku, but Sasaki seems satisfied with that, clenching her hand into a fist and looking back at Izuku. "With my *history*, it's riskier for me to use it than it is for most people," she says, and Izuku blinks.

"H-History?" he asks, and Sasaki grins, her eyes narrowing.

"Thanks for taking the bait, *Izuku*," she says, hissing his first name out like it's something unusual, like it's a song lyric. Sasaki holds her hands out, palms up. "Since you asked so nicely," she says, and the world warps and bends, like the edges of reality are melting around him. Izuku blinks, trying to move back, to get out of the way of the world falling to pieces, away from the dripping pieces of the world above him and the holes opening in the ground, but suddenly, things stabilize.

Izuku is sitting on an exam table, in a doctor's office. He tries to move, tries to shift or look around, but he can't. He's filled with panic, hot and urgent and pressured, but his heart doesn't beat faster in his chest, and his breaths don't come faster. Izuku feels himself reach a hand up, brushing a strand of hair out of his face. He catches sight of the hand out of the corner of his eyes, and he sees that it's paler and smaller than his own. It's the hand of a child, and suddenly things make sense.

I'm in one of Sasaki's memories, Izuku realizes. He can't move because this has already happened--Izuku can't change anything. Izuku still feels like his brain is turning in fast circles, still feels like if he were in his own body, he'd have a racing heartbeat and would be gasping for breath, but he manages to calm himself down enough to pay attention to the world around him.

Izuku's head turns without him telling it to, and he sees someone sitting on the exam table beside him. She looks to be about four or five and she has long, waist-length black hair, pin-straight and shiny. Her eyes are a beautiful, brilliant gold that reminds Izuku of Fury's eyes, but her face is so different from his. She looks soft, kind, even with the huge, tawny wings sprouting from her back and the tall, deer's antlers rising from the crest of her forehead. Izuku can see, in Sasaki's peripheral vision, that this girl has a long, scaled tail that swishes back and forth, crinkling the paper that covers the exam table.

"Maiko," she says, her voice small. "Are you scared?" Izuku feels his head move in a nod, quick and hurried. Izuku watches through Sasaki's eyes as this girl--her sister, Izuku thinks--reaches out and takes her hand.

There's a knocking sound, like knuckles rapping on a door, and Izuku's body flinches in surprise. He turns to see a door opening, revealing a doctor in a white coat with a blue button down underneath. He's young, with fluffy brown hair and stubble on his cheeks, and he's also definitely

not Japanese. When he opens his mouth to speak, it's in English, but Izuku understands it anyway.

"Now, Maiko, Hotaru, you are two very special little girls," he says, giving them a smile. He looks up, at someone behind them, and Izuku's--Maiko's--head cranes back to see a woman, tall and weathered looking, with fine lines around her mouth and eyes. She's scowling, her black, pin-straight hair cut at her shoulders, and her shoulders and upper arms are covered in a thin layer of black feathers.

"Did it work?" the woman asks. "You said you wouldn't know until their quirks manifested, and now they have." She taps a foot against the ground, and Izuku feels a rush of fear and shame that isn't his own--it's Sasaki's. Izuku turns back to look at the doctor, who's grin doesn't even falter.

"Oh, it worked," he says, and he pulls out a sheet of paper. There are bands and lines on it, diagrams and graphs. The entire paper is split in two down the center, and Izuku can only read the two names at the top before the paper is handed over Izuku's head. *Maiko Sasaki* is on the left, and *Hotaru Sasaki* is on the right. The woman behind the two girls takes the paper. *She must be their mother*, Izuku thinks. He can feel Maiko's heart beating fast in her chest as the woman reads the paper. The edges of her lips quirk up in something that superficially resembles a smile.

"Excellent," she says. She hands the paper back to the doctor, and Izuku's head tilts back to watch the doctor take it. Hotaru squeezes Izuku's hand.

"Now, they'll need to be careful," the doctor says, sliding the paper back into a file folder. "No quirk suppressants for them, *ever*, not even if they get side effects, which they shouldn't. Neither of them are going to be able to fly, but you were told to expect that, right?" he says, looking up, over the girls' heads. Izuku feels Maiko swallow.

"I was," their mother replies, voice curt. "I must admit that I'm still not entirely clear on *why* you were able to induce the mutations but not able to enhance them to the degree that they could fly. There's not much of a point in extra limbs if they don't *do* anything." Izuku feels Maiko's stomach flip over nervously, and his head turns to look at Hotaru, who gives him a soft, worried smile that doesn't hide the fear in her eyes. *They're afraid of their mother*, he realizes.

"This technology is tricky," the doctor says, sighing. "You know full well that your two are the first to ever survive to childbirth, and for you to have twins? You should be happy with this result." He clicks his tongue. "I know I would be. Two beautiful, healthy girls with multiple quirks and the ability to pass that on to their children? It's really a miracle." Izuku's eyes blink wonderingly at the doctor. He gets the sense that Maiko wasn't used to being called a *miracle*.

"Well, they're *not* quirks," their mother snaps. "They're *exogenous mutations*, aren't they?" She taps her foot, and Izuku feels Hotaru give his hand another squeeze.

"Oh, yes, but it'll probably be easier for them if they just tell people they're quirk mutations," the doctor says, shrugging. "This isn't exactly public knowledge, you know?" The mother snorts, and Izuku feels Maiko's shoulders shaking. He hates that he feels *sorry* for her, knowing how she is today, but he can't help but wish that this child wasn't having to go through this, that she didn't have to be so afraid of her mother.

"Yeah, I got that when my husband had to go through the mafia to find your lab," their mother says, and even though Izuku can't see her, he would bet that she's rolling her eyes. "I'm not entirely convinced this is worthy of the rest of the payment, though."

Izuku watches the doctor open his mouth, watches him start to speak, but the world starts to break apart again, dripping and smearing and falling to bits. Izuku blinks, and he *can* blink, can move his

own body. The world falls away, and Izuku is suddenly sitting on the ottoman, his breathing coming hard and fast. He has a pounding headache, and he feels something warm and wet under his nose. Izuku reaches up, wiping under it, and when he looks down at his hand, there's a smear of blood.

"There," Sasaki says, and her voice is breathless. She's panting, and when Izuku looks up at her, she's covered in a thin sheen of sweat, blood dripping her nose and ears, welling up in her eyes. Izuku blinks up at her, feeling his brows knit together. Izuku swallows as Sasaki grins, her teeth bloody. As she does, a drop of blood leaks out from the corner of her left eye. She reaches into her pocket with a shaking hand, filling it open and pressing a few buttons.

"Yes?" Fury's voice comes. Izuku is breathing hard, but not as hard as Sasaki as she drops down to sit on the couch. She reaches up the hand and isn't holding her phone and wipes at her eyes, smearing the blood all over her cheeks.

"Come on up," she says. "I...I have Midoriya up here," she says, blinking. The motion pulls some of the blood from the bottoms of her eyes and turning the whites of her eyes pink with the blood. Izuku reaches a hand up to his own eyes, touching the corner of his eyes, but when he pulls his hand away, the drop of liquid on his fingertip is clear. *It's affecting her worse than it is me.*

"Okay," Fury says. There's a pause. "Are you okay?" he asks. His voice is quieter than Izuku has ever heard it. It's almost timid. Sasaki blinks, slowly and Izuku watches her eyes look to the side slightly.

"I am," Sasaki says. "I took trigger, though, so Midoriya and I are..." her eyes shut for a moment, before opening again. "We're a bit worn out," she says, her lips curling up into a slight smile.

"You took trigger?" Fury asks. He sounds surprised. "I'm on my way up," he says. "Haruta and Sumire are with me. Do you want me to bring Manami up as well?" Izuku watches Sasaki lick her upper lip, spreading a tiny film of blood over her lip.

"Please," Sasaki says. She clicks the phone shut, breathing out. She looks up at Izuku, her eyes narrowing. Izuku can see that her horns are curling back, her wings shrinking, her fangs pulling back up into her gums. *The trigger is wearing off,* Izuku thinks.

"Had fun?" Sasaki asks. Her lips curl up into a smile. "That's one of my favorite tricks," she says, reaching up and wiping her face with the back of her arm. Izuku swallows.

"It--it hurts you," Izuku says. Sasaki raises an eyebrow at him, smiling.

"I didn't think you'd care," she says, a grin on her face. "Worried about me? You see any sick child and you suddenly decide you've got to save them, is that it?" Sasaki giggles. "You're pretty predictable, turns out. You might do surprising things, but in the end, you always act the same." She reaches up a hand, tapping her finger on the side of her face. "I think I've got you just about figured out, Midoriya." Izuku blinks, watching her for a moment, before he breathes out.

"You keep surprising me," Izuku says, honestly. Sasaki blinks at him, tipping her head to the side slightly. Before she can say anything, though, there's a knock at the door.

"Come in," Sasaki says, her gaze moving up, past Izuku and to the door. Izuku turns, watching as Fury steps into the room. Fury's mouth is set in a low frown, and he only pauses for a moment before he steps aside to lean against the wall. Izuku watches as Haruta shuffles into the room quickly, only for Fury to grab the edge of his collar and yank him to the side, out of the way of the doorway. Izuku watches as he shoves Haruta down and to the ground beside him.

“Maiko-chan!” Manami says as she walks quickly into the room. She’s wearing an oversized pink sweatshirt, a pair of too-loose grey athletic shorts, and blue nitrile gloves, the kind that Izuku has seen doctors wear. She’s holding a box in one hand and a white towel in the other, and she runs right up to Sasaki, not even hesitating. There’s no fear as she slides onto the couch on her cut-up, scarred legs. She reaches out, grabbing ahold of Sasaki’s face gently with one hand, resting on Sasaki’s jaw. She starts dabbing at Sasaki’s face with the towel, the cloth coming away red as it cleans off the blood. *It must be damp*, Izuku thinks.

Miura comes in last, her face the same bruised mess as before. She walks slowly, like she’s tired, and she sits right on the ottoman, beside Izuku. Izuku turns to look at her, feeling his brow furrow slightly. Miura casts a glance over to him, her face blank. Izuku wonders what she’s thinking. He wonders how she and Sasaki met, what happened for three children to start working under her. He wonders what happened to the little girls he saw in the memory, to Hotaru and Maiko.

“Midoriya,” Sasaki says, eyes moving to the side to look at Izuku as Manami cleans off her eyes. “Did you betray us?” she asks, her voice quieter than before. Izuku watches Manami stick her tongue out in concentration as she reaches up, dabbing the cloth carefully at Sasaki’s face. It’s the exact same expression that Izuku had seen Sasaki making when she drew up the trigger from the vial. *How old is Manami? How old was she when they met Sasaki?*

“No,” Izuku says, and he thinks, strongly. *Don’t worry, Haruta. I didn’t betray them.* It helps that technically, he didn’t betray *all* of them. Izuku knows that Haruta can tell that it’s a lie to the question that Sasaki asked, but he hopes that Haruta can keep it together. *Don’t stutter. Answer calmly, even if it’s slowly. You can do it. I believe in you,* he thinks with all his might. Izuku watches Sasaki’s eyes focus behind him, where Izuku knows Fury is standing.

“Haruta?” Sasaki asks, her lips curling up into a smile. Izuku hears Haruta draw in a shaky breath. *I didn’t betray them. I’m telling the truth,* Izuku thinks.

“H-He didn’t betray you,” Haruta says. “He’s telling the truth.” Izuku feels a swell of pride in his chest. *I’m going to get you and Ema to safety, Haruta. You’re doing great. Thank you,* he thinks, and he hopes that that intentional thought covers up his first instinctual thought of *I don’t have to die this time*, because that’s going to be hard to explain. Izuku will take it. He doesn’t want to have to do this again.

“What’s he thinking about?” Sasaki asks, her eyes narrowing. Izuku swallows.

“H-He doesn’t--he’s afraid of--of you,” Haruta stutters out. Izuku shuts his eyes for just a moment, then opens them again. Haruta yelps, like he’s been hit.

“About the *question*,” Fury hisses. Izuku resists the urge to look back, because he knows that the only thing he’ll see is Fury hurting Haruta, and he doesn’t want to see that. *I’ll save him,* Izuku reassures himself. *This won’t have to keep happening.*

“He’s not--he’s not thinking about--about the question,” Haruta says, his voice high and strained like something’s putting pressure on his throat. Izuku swallows, hard.

“Share with the class,” Sasaki says, a sly smile on her lips. “I want to know what goes on in that pretty little head of his.”

“He--he wants to save me,” Haruta says. Izuku feels his heart drop into his stomach. “He wants--he doesn’t want me to be in pain.”

Sasaki laughs, tipping her head back. Izuku watches Manami frown and lean back, letting Sasaki

cackle at the ceiling. The cloth in her hand is mostly red, now, but Sasaki's face is pretty much clean. Sasaki straightens up, looking at Izuku.

"You're pretty naive if you thought you'd be able to save him," Sasaki says, grinning. Izuku frowns, and he's opening his mouth to speak before she has the chance to continue.

"I'm not that naive anymore," Izuku says, his voice quick and sharp. "I stopped being that naive around the second time Fury used his quirk on me." Izuku grits his teeth, clenches his hands into fists, feels his nails dig into his skin. "Do my motives have to be pure, too? Or is it not enough to be willing to work for you?" Izuku shakes his head. "So what if I want to help Haruta? It doesn't *matter*. I-I work for you now," Izuku says, looking down at his lap. He can feel tears burning in his eyes. "I can't save him, sure, but I can take some of his pain." Izuku waits for the retort, waits for Sasaki to pull a gun on him or activate her quirk or strangle him, but the pain doesn't come. After a moment, Izuku looks up to see Sasaki, staring at him with a blank face and wide eyes.

Sasaki smiles slowly, her eyes crinkling. "So optimistic," she says, reaching up to brush a strand of hair out of her face where it had stuck to the dampness on her skin. "Okay." Izuku blinks.

"Okay?" he asks, before he can stop himself. Sasaki's grin widens.

"Yes, okay," she says. "I believe that you didn't betray us," she says, not resisting as Manami grabs her face again and starts to dab at a smear of blood that lingers by her ear. "If you had, you'd think you stood a chance at actually saving Haruta for real, not just helping 'take his pain' or whatever." Her eyes watch him, her eyes half lidded. "I won't let you get away without proving your loyalty, though."

Izuku blinks. "What do--what do you mean?" he asks, the words spilling out of him. He's so relieved that it makes his chest hurt, that he thinks he can hardly believe it. Sasaki's grin widens into something predatory, though, and Izuku has the fleeting thought that this can't be anything good.

"From now on," she says, "you and Haruta will be giving each other your punishments, as directed by Fury." Her eyes squeeze nearly shut with the force of her grin. "And you'll be reporting to Manami, not Sumire. I can't have her playing favorites anymore, now, can I?" Sasaki asks, giggling. Izuku stares at her with what he's sure is a wide-eyed look, his mouth slightly open. He turns, then, to look at Haruta, who's looking up at him with such wide, pained eyes that Izuku wants to throw up.

"You don't have a choice," Haruta says, his voice shaky but clear. "If you--if you say no, she's gonna--" he cuts himself off with a yelp, suddenly, and Izuku watches him bend over, clutching at his chest and gasping. Izuku starts towards him, but Sasaki's voice stops him.

"Oh, he's fine," Sasaki says, and when Izuku looks over to her, she's rolling her eyes. "I'm just inflicting a panic attack on him. It's nothing he hasn't felt before," she says, and Izuku knows that the laughter in her voice is calculated to make Izuku hurt, to cause him pain. Izuku swallows, and he turns to face Sasaki fully. He does the only thing he can do.

"Okay," Izuku says. "I'll do it." He watches, his stomach flipping over uncomfortably as Sasaki grins, too wide.

"Excellent," she says. "You'll start tonight. Don't leave the tower."

As Izuku nods, swallowing around the lump in his throat, he can't help the wave of dread and guilt that washes over him, heavy, like it's trying to drag him down into the ground. It's only a small

comfort when he hears Haruta cough and start to breathe semi-normally behind him.

Chapter End Notes

content warning: medical stuff, torture, child abuse, mentions of vomiting, graphic drug use (trigger)

[discord!](#) [carrrd!](#)

i hope you enjoyed!!! i've been dying to write the sasaki memory scene so :D

deprivation

Chapter Summary

last time: izuku gets questioned and tortured, learns that sasaki has drugs and also had a twin sister and was a medical experiment, fun!

Chapter Notes

hey guys have an extra long chapter that is basically exclusively torture. the exam went great im just moody because the weather here suck

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Izuku swallows, watching as Fury grabs Haruta by the bicep and yanks him up off of the ground, pulling him into a standing position. Izuku can see the way that Haruta is biting his lower lip, the way that his silver hair sticks to his sweaty face, the way his eyes are filled with tears. Fury looks at Izuku, scowling.

“You too,” Fury says, jerking his head up. “We’re going to the basement,” he says, and Izuku feels a wave of cold fear wash over him. Izuku starts to shake his head, starts to protest, but he stops when he sees the desperate, pleading look on Haruta’s face. *I can’t make this any harder for him*, Izuku thinks, and he stands up on shaking legs. Fury doesn’t wait, yanking Haruta behind him as he stalks out the door and into the hallway of the seventh floor. Izuku takes a deep breath before following, casting a glance back into the room as he goes. Manami is taking her gloves off beside Sasaki, who’s watching Izuku openly. Miura is staring at the coffee table, unblinking. Izuku wishes he could say something to her, but he walks out the door in silence.

“Excited?” Fury asks, smirking as he looks over his shoulder. He and Haruta are already by the elevators, and Fury leans forward, pressing the button. “I know I am,” he says, laughing under his breath. Izuku swallows.

“Can I--can I have all of the punishment?” Izuku asks. He watches Haruta look up at him, blue eyes widening slightly. He knows there’s a chance that Fury will just say no on the basis that punishing Haruta will be worse for Izuku than Izuku getting tortured himself, but Izuku has to try. *Haruta’s already so hurt.*

“Sure,” Fury says, shrugging. “But you’re not going to just get yours plus his.” Fury looks back at Izuku, his eyes narrowing. “I’ll let you do it if you agree to take a little *extra*,” Fury says, his lips widening into a smirk. Izuku swallows, nodding at the same time Haruta speaks, eyes wide.

“Don’t,” Haruta whispers. “It’s not--it’s not worth it,” he says, his gaze moving to the ground. “You don’t know what you’re agreeing to.” Izuku stares at him.

“I’ll do it,” Izuku says, watching Haruta. Haruta squeezes his eyes shut, a tear dropping from one eye and onto the ground. *It’ll be okay*, Izuku thinks. *I’ll be okay*. Haruta shakes his head, and Izuku pretends that it’s not a reply to him.

Fury laughs, a short, fake sound as the elevator opens. He lets go of Haruta, who shuffles into the elevator without protest. Izuku starts to move into the elevator as well, but Fury blocks his way, reaching out a hand and grabbing Izuku's shoulder. Izuku flinches back at the motion, but it's not enough to stop Fury from taking hold of him. Fury's fingers press bruisingly tight into Izuku's shoulder.

"New rule," Fury says, his eyes narrowed as he sticks his free hand out behind him, stopping the elevator doors from starting to close. "*You* have to hide your injuries, not me." Fury takes a few steps back into the elevator, pulling Izuku with him. Izuku blinks, startled.

"But I--" Izuku starts, but Fury shakes his head.

"Ah, no," Fury says, raising his other hand and wagging a finger at Izuku as he tugs Izuku the rest of the way into the elevator. "You were at the raid and you were one of the injured ones, right? I know that your stupid little school knows about your identity." His eyebrow raises. "I mean, you wouldn't be ignoring my texts unless you were badly injured, would you?" Fury turns his head back. "Haruta, press the button for the first floor," he snaps. Haruta nods, scrambling to obey.

"I-I was in the hospital," Izuku says, feeling caught off guard. *Why didn't Sasaki ask this?*

"They already knew," Haruta murmurs. Izuku blinks, staring at him. Haruta's gaze is pinned to the ground. "Shinsou," he whispers. Fury laughs, loud in the small space.

"I mean, seriously," Fury says, stepping forward towards Izuku, who backs away until his back is pressed to the doors of the elevator. "Did you think we wouldn't do a little background research before we brought you in and questioned you?" Fury presses a palm to the elevator door just beside Izuku's head. Izuku leans away from it, but Fury just puts his other hand on the other side, boxing Izuku in. Izuku swallows, trying to look anywhere but Fury's face.

"W-what was--what was the point in asking me, then?" Izuku mumbles, his throat feeling half closed. He almost falls backwards when the elevator doors open. He hadn't even heard the chime, but he's grateful to be off of the thing, grateful to be able to put some space between him and Fury, if only for a moment.

"To see if your story matched what this one," Fury jerks a thumb back at Haruta, "gave us. Too bad that the pussy's useless," Fury spits. Izuku doesn't miss the way Haruta flinches like he's been struck. "All he told us was that you were in the hospital. I was kinda hoping you'd been hit with one of the quirk-nullifying bullets, though." Fury laughs as they walk across the lobby, to the set of elevators that go to the basement. "I would have liked to kill you myself."

"Why don't you, then?" Izuku asks, because well, if Fury *does* kill him, it wouldn't be the end of the world. Fury snorts, jamming his finger into the call button for the elevator.

"*I* might think you're relatively useless and way too high risk," Fury says, glancing back at him with a raised eyebrow. "But the boss thinks you're worth her time, and I trust her judgement more than I trust my own." Izuku takes that in, mulling it over. He bites at his lower lip as the elevator doors open and Fury steps to the side, gesturing for them to go inside. Izuku leads this time, stepping into the smaller, dingier elevator. It makes him feel a little sick to his stomach.

"How did you--how did you three end up working for her, anyway?" Izuku asks, trying to keep his tone bitter, like he's trying to upset Fury and not like he's fishing for information. Fury steps onto the elevator, pressing the button for the first basement floor before he slides his hands into the pockets of his slacks, regarding Izuku with contempt in his stare.

“What, did you think you just had to ask a few personal questions and I’d open up to you about my tragic backstory?” Fury asks, rolling his eyes. “Give me a break. You’re not my *friend*, Izuku.” He smirks as the elevator chimes, and he walks backwards out of it, his gaze never leaving Izuku’s, blocked only by dark glass. “You’re my *pet*.”

Izuku swallows as Fury turns on his heels, walking down the hallway. Izuku glances to Haruta, who only gives Izuku a quick, sad smile before he steps off of the elevator. He moves like his body is hurting, like he’s already in a lot of pain, and it makes Izuku more sure in his decision to take Haruta’s punishment for him, even if it means that things might be worse for Izuku. Izuku starts after Haruta, not missing the way the older boy glances back at him with pain in his eyes.

“You shouldn’t d-do this for me,” Haruta whispers. Fury is a few paces ahead of them. “He can-- you don’t know what he’s capable of.” Izuku bites at his lower lip.

“I have a pretty good idea,” Izuku murmurs. Haruta shakes his head, his tail flicking behind him in annoyance, but he doesn’t say anything else. Izuku watches Fury stopping in front of a pair of double doors. He reaches into his pocket, pulling out a keychain, and he slips a key into one of the doorknobs, turning it to unlock the door. Fury pulls one of the doors open, holding it wide open for Izuku and Haruta.

“Haruta, why don’t you get Izuku settled?” Fury asks, mock-sweetness in his voice. Izuku can hear the click of Haruta’s throat as the other boy swallows, but he nods, walking quickly into the open room. Izuku pauses for a moment before he follows, not wanting to make things worse for himself by hesitating.

The room is dark inside, but when the two of them take a few steps into it, the lights flicker on automatically. It’s a large room, and most of it is taken up by long, steel-topped tables. The walls are lined with drawers, huge, metal drawers, and each table has a sink attached to the end. It takes Izuku a moment to place what the room reminds him of, where he’s seen something like this before, but when he puts it together, it stops him dead in his tracks. He’s standing in a morgue, or at least a room designed to look like one. Izuku feels frozen in place.

“It’s not--there aren’t any actual bodies,” Haruta says, quietly. Izuku watches him walk up to a metal cart pushed up against one wall. He pulls out what looks like a pair of handcuffs, and he looks down at them with something that looks like regret in his eyes.

“You’ve done this before,” Izuku says, his throat feeling full and thick. Haruta shakes his head.

“Only--I’ve only ever been the one--the one being hurt,” Haruta says, his gaze pinned to the ground. “But, um, he--sometimes he has me get the supplies myself. Lets me choose.”

“Not today,” Fury says, stepping into the room and pulling the door shut behind him. “Izuku isn’t as *experienced* as you, so I’ll be calling the shots.” Izuku watches his gaze catch on the handcuffs. “Good choice, though,” Fury says. Izuku can see Haruta’s throat bob as he swallows.

“Is it--is it too late for him to change his mind?” Haruta asks, blurting it out with wide eyes. “Can I please--can I have my share of it? Instead of him--of him getting extra?” Haruta pleads. Izuku feels something that might be relief and might be guilt rolling in his gut. Fury raises an eyebrow, snorts.

“Looks like it’s gonna hurt the both of you worse this way,” Fury says. “So no.” His gaze moves to Izuku. “Shirt, shoes, and pants off,” Fury says, waving a hand at Izuku. “And get on one of the tables.” Izuku stares at him for a moment, before Fury raises an eyebrow. “Do I need to say it *slower* for you?” Fury mocks, giving Izuku a look. Izuku shakes his head quickly, starting to unbutton the shirt. He hopes that they don’t throw it away or damage it, because then UA might

not get the information they need.

Not that I really want my teachers to hear this, Izuku thinks, dryly. Izuku pulls the shirt off, shivering as the cold air sends goosebumps up his skin. He kicks his shoes and socks off, but he hesitates with his hands at his pants button. He feels something uncomfortable prick up his spine, and he glances to where Fury's watching him. Fury's eyes narrow.

"I'm not a fucking *creep*," Fury snaps. "Keep your fucking panties on, and stop looking at me like that." Izuku swallows, pressing his eyes shut for a moment before he takes his pants off, exposing the skin of his legs to the air. His boxers aren't enough to hold in heat, and he wonders, briefly, if Haruta would warn him, if Fury was going to--if he *was* a creep. Izuku looks up at Haruta, who stares back at him before shaking his head, a quick motion.

"He isn't," Haruta says, quietly. Izuku sees Fury whip around to look at Haruta.

"Got something to share with the class?" Fury asks. Haruta flinches, shaking his head. He's moving his fingers anxiously over the silver handcuffs he's holding. Izuku swallows, moving over to the nearest table and climbing up on top of it. It's angled, slightly, with the ice cold steel leaning down to a drain at one end of the table. Izuku can see the value in using a table like this, one made for slicing open dead bodies. He supposes it's just as easy to clean if the blood comes from a living one.

"Lie down on your back," Fury says, walking up to the table. He knocks one hand at the end by the sink. "Head on this end." Izuku nods shakily, complying. He's shaking, although he isn't sure if it's from the cold or the fear or both. He lies down, and the table underneath seems to sap the last of his body heat out of him. Izuku looks at Fury, feeling exposed as Fury stares openly at the scar on Izuku's stomach.

"Cuff his arms to the table," Fury says, not looking away from Izuku. His face is flat. "Both arms. I'll get his legs, only because you're slow," Fury says. There's less heat in his voice, somehow, and Izuku is reminded of the way that Fury acts when he cleans Izuku's wounds. Izuku swallows, shutting his eyes as he feels the touch of Haruta's fingers on his wrist, wrapping it loosely in the handcuff. There's a clicking, and Izuku tests the cuffs, tugging up against them. He can't move his arm up more than a centimeter. Izuku opens his eyes to stare at the ceiling, at the industrial lights above him. He can hear Haruta's footsteps as he walks around Izuku's head to snap a cuff around the other wrist.

Izuku flinches, his legs jerking up when he feels a band being stretched across his ankles. He strains his neck, craning his head to look down at his feet. Fury is securing a black band over his ankles, strapping him to the table. Izuku breathes in, out. He might not be able to escape, he might be trapped but at least he knows that UA is listening. If they leave him like this for too long, if they try to keep him here, UA will come to save him. Aizawa will protect him.

Thinking it over and over again doesn't make Izuku believe it. He shuts his eyes, letting his mind slip away. He's not sure if it'll be easier or harder if he knows what to expect, but he doesn't want to be here, and as far as he's concerned, he doesn't really have to be. Not mentally. Izuku tries not to notice when a finger trails down the side of his arm, but he still shivers. He knows it's Fury, because Haruta's fingers are rougher, more calloused.

"Soak him," Fury says, his voice soft, quiet. Izuku blinks open his eyes, trying to turn his head to the side to see what's going on. He sees Haruta, lips pressed together and his brows furrowed low on his face, walking towards the side of the table by Izuku's head. The sink. Izuku shuts his eyes when he hears the water start to run.

He can't help but gasp in shock as the ice-cold water hits the bare skin of his stomach. It's not just cold--it's icy, like the water has been chilled on purpose. Izuku thinks that it probably has. It feels almost *hot*, burning his skin and making his muscles reflexively try to jerk away, making him erupt in shivers almost immediately. He tries not to make any noise, tries to not even *think* about how it feels, but Izuku can't help to way that he gasps and yelps, trying and failing to move himself away from the stream of water as it moves to soak his entire body.

"S-Stop," Izuku says, even though he knows it's useless. Fury starts laughing, almost immediately. The stream of water moves from his stomach, down his legs and feet, then back up again.

"Already?" Fury taunts. "But we're just getting started. Face, Haruta," he adds, voice sing-song in a way that reminds Izuku of Sasaki. He doesn't have a chance to suck in any air before the spray of ice-cold water rushes over his face and scalp, sending him into a new wave of shivers. It stops shortly after, though, with the sound of rushing water disappearing into the sound of a few drops against metal. Izuku thinks he hears Haruta putting the showerhead back into place, but he can't be sure. He opens his eyes, blinking away drops of freezing water as he gasps and writhes.

"I like this one," Fury says, his voice light hearted, "because even the ones with high pain tolerance end up struggling." He laughs, short and under his breath. "Can't help the reflex, right?" Izuku swallows, staring up at the lights on the ceiling and hating the way that Fury knows *exactly* why this hurts, why this *works*. Izuku focuses on drawing a breath in and out. He just has to do what he did that other time, just has to unfocus and let it happen. He just has to go somewhere else.

"Scalpel," Fury says, almost sounding bored. "I want to see him bleed. I know he likes cutting, so this should be a nice little break for the both of you, right?" Fury asks, and Izuku hears the sound of fingers tapping against metal. "You're not moving, Haruta."

"I-I can't do this," Haruta says, his voice high pitched and shaky. "I c-can't. I just--I can't," he says. Izuku feels his heart sinking in his chest. It's harder for Haruta than it is for him--he doesn't even know how much of his thoughts that Haruta can read, if he can feel Izuku's pain, too.

"Aww, chickening out?" Fury asks. "It's okay, Haruta. You've been so good today, after all," he says, his voice gentle. Izuku blinks, shock filling him. *What?* This doesn't feel right. Izuku knows Fury by now, knows how he works. This is too good to be true.

"I-I have?" Haruta asks. He sounds as wary as Izuku does. "You don't--" Haruta cuts himself off with a squeak. "No, no I-I didn't mean it, sir *please* don't--" Haruta starts, babbling, but Fury cuts him off.

"Shh," he says, the shushing sound loud in the room. "Blindfold him," Fury says, his voice low. "You know better than to complain when *you're* not the one getting punished," Fury snaps. "I mean really, you should be grateful. *You* don't have to do anything."

"What?" Izuku asks, turning his head to watch Haruta shaking, inching back from Fury and over to the cart. Izuku sees Haruta pick up a long, black length of cloth. "What is it? What are you going to--going to do?" Izuku can hear his shaking in his voice, can hear his teeth chattering in the cold.

"Nothing," Fury says, a smirk creeping up his lips as Haruta approaches Izuku. His face is pained and teary as he reaches out, sliding one end of the blindfold under Izuku's head, through soaked green hair. Izuku blinks in the darkness, in the black.

"Now these," Fury says, and Izuku swallows, biting at his lower lip.

"What?" Izuku asks, again. He feels Haruta slip something onto his head, over his ears, and all of

the sounds in the room become muffled. Izuku struggles slightly, but he can't hear anything. He blinks, straining his ears.

"What are you doing?" he asks, and he can't *hear* his own voice so much as feel it, in his jaw and throat. It's muffled, but he can hear the tiniest trace of it, just like he can hear that someone is replying, that there's words being said, but not who's saying them or what they are. Izuku listens, waiting for someone else to do something. Nothing comes.

Izuku can feel his heartbeat in his chest, can hear the rushing of the blood in his ears, but he can't see anything except for a few pinpricks of light that seep through the thick cloth of the blindfold. He can't hear anything except for his own body. Izuku blinks, starting to feel panic rise in his throat, but he doesn't start to really, truly struggle until the lights behind the blindfold wink out. He's plunged into real, true darkness.

Izuku starts to thrash, starts to slam the handcuffs and his hands against the table, if only to hear something. It works, but the noise that should be loud and echoing in the metal room is just a tiny, muffled clink. The pain that bursts through his wrists, sharp and bright, is more real than that, but even that is dulled by the painful cold wrapped around his body. Izuku realizes then, what Fury is doing.

He's leaving me here, Izuku thinks, with horror. *Sensory deprivation. Isolation. Fury is going to leave me here.*

Izuku shuts his eyes, even under the blindfold, and he lets himself shout. He lets himself scream into the empty room, just to test the headphones over his ears. He can hear it through the conduction of his bones, maybe a *touch* through the headphones, but not much. Not as much as he'd like to. The only things that Izuku can *really* feel are the icy cold of the metal and the evaporating water on his skin, the pain of too-cold limbs, the bite of handcuffs into his bare wrists.

"I'm okay," Izuku says into the empty room, even though he can't hear it. He hopes that it's not too late, that Aizawa isn't already on his way over. It'd really suck, because Izuku would have to kill himself to avoid his cover being blown, and then he'd have to go through all of this again.

"I'm just alone in a room," Izuku says. "Sensory deprivation. I'm not in any danger." If Fury is listening in, well, Izuku can pass this off as reassuring himself. It would make sense. He starts repeating it under his breath, that he's okay, that he's not in any danger. He keeps doing it until he starts to feel fuzzy, starts to lose his focus on the world.

He's not sure if time is passing slowly or quickly, because he has no way of telling time. All he knows is that slowly, he stops shivering. He stops feeling cold, really, but the aching pain in his entire body does not go away. It does not fade, and Izuku does not feel warm so much as he feels nothing. There is no longer the sensation of water pulling away from his skin, of it drying slowly, of drops of it trickling down his scalp like icy caterpillars. The only thing that Izuku can feel now is pain. His head hurts, his jaw hurts, and his throat hurts, probably from screaming. His wrists ache and burn, and if he focuses, he thinks that he might feel the sensation of warm blood dripping off of the cuts that surely line his wrists. He can feel an ache in the bony parts of his body that rest against the steel table.

Izuku does not know when he is awake or asleep except for when he wakes up and tries to open his eyes. He becomes slowly, painfully aware of a gnawing hunger in his gut, of a dryness in his throat. Izuku thinks that it must have been hours when he starts to miss the water, when he starts to wish that he could lick droplets of it from off of his face. He's so thirsty that he feels lightheaded, but he supposes it won't matter if he passes out.

He thinks he actually does, for a while, because one moment he's just thirsty and in pain and his wrists feel raw and bloody and the next he's thirsty and in pain and his bladder is painfully, miserably full. His wrists still hurt, but they feel swollen, too. Hot, almost, but Izuku isn't sure if he's just imagining that from the cold in the room. Even without the water, it's miserable.

"I'm still okay," Izuku says, to the empty room. "This sucks. This really sucks, but I'm okay." It helps, that Izuku knows someone is listening on the other end of the line. He pretends that he's under the effects of a quirk and that he's really, actually home with Aizawa and his mom and Neito, that he's curled up under a blanket with the three of them holding him close. After he reaches the point that he can't hold in his urine any more, when he feels the trickle of hot liquid run down his bare legs and towards the drain in the table, he lets himself imagine that Kacchan is there, too, maybe Shinsou and Todoroki as well. Izuku lets himself cry, too, sobbing big, wet gasps of air. He can't hear them, but he can feel them, and that's what matters.

Izuku drifts in and out of consciousness for a while, murmuring that he's okay, that he's not in danger, every time he wakes up. It doesn't stop him from feeling hopeful, from briefly hoping that someone's really come to save him when he sees the pinpricks of light reappear from the other side of the blindfold. Izuku starts to cry when he sees them, relief thick in his chest, choking him.

The relief fades when he hears muffled laughter. It's replaced with cold, burning dread, and Izuku starts to struggle again, jerking and fighting against his restraints. He can hear conversation of at least two people, but he can't tell who until the headphones are lifted.

The world becomes very loud, very quickly. Izuku can't tell if he's relieved, or if this is worse. He feels overstimulated almost immediately, and he cringes away from the sound of Fury's laughter, from the whine that rips out of his own throat.

"Hold still," Fury says. "I'm not trying to kill you, so you get two choices. You drink, or I'm going to have to stick a needle in you and give you fluids that way." Izuku swallows, hard.

"I-I can drink," he says, his voice raspy. He hears Fury chuckle.

"Okay, if you say so," he says, and Izuku feels his head being yanked up roughly. He hisses at the sensation, and right away, a straw is shoved between his lips. Izuku starts to drink, sucking up the water greedily. It tastes amazing, cool and clear and perfect. Izuku doesn't stop until the water stops coming up through the straw, until there's the loud, sucking noise as the straw pulls at nothing. Izuku hears Fury hum, like he's satisfied.

"Good," Fury says, and the cup's being pulled away from his mouth. "Still gonna give you the IV, though," he says, and Izuku would be anything he's smirking. "You don't get to make choices."

Izuku does not give Fury the satisfaction of hearing him reply. Instead, Izuku lies perfectly still. He hears the tearing of paper, then smells the sharp scent of alcohol, cutting through the scent of piss and sweat. Izuku feels the sensation of the alcohol wipe being rubbed onto the skin in the crook of his elbow. It's too gentle to be Fury, and Izuku leans his head up, even though he knows he won't be able to see.

"Who is that?" Izuku asks, his voice hoarse. He hears Fury sigh, but someone else answers.

"Manami," the voice says, calm and happy. "I'm the only one here who knows how to put one of these bad boys in," she says. Izuku winces as he feels the burn of a needle sliding into his skin. There's a few moments of jostling, then Izuku feels something being taped over the IV, and the initial burn fades. Izuku sighs, breathing out.

“Don’t rip it out,” Fury says. “Otherwise, I’ll give you something nastier next time.” Izuku swallows, nodding even though it hurts his sore neck.

“Ready?” Manami says, her voice strangely excited, and Izuku feels a shiver of dread run through him. He opens his mouth to say something, but he stops when he feels the brush of bare fingers against the skin of his arm.

Everything seems to shake, and Izuku sees a flash of multicolor light, and then Manami’s quirk seems to settle into Izuku’s bones, and the despair and dread he feels is crushing. Izuku hears himself whimper and whine pathetically for the few moments left before Fury is sliding the headphones back over Izuku’s ears. Hot tears run down Izuku’s face as his chest aches with fear and pain and a deep, heavy despair. Izuku can’t even try to slow his breathing as his panic grows and grows stronger and stronger until it seems to overtake him completely. He sees the lights flicker out, and that when he dares to start talking.

“M okay,” he gasps out. “P-Panic--panic a-attack,” he says, his lips feeling strange and staticky. Izuku is suddenly hit with the thought that he can’t quite feel his fingers, that it feels like his hands aren’t there at all. He struggles against the handcuffs to try and feel something, and the relief that washes over him when he feels the sharp ache and the tearing sensation in his wrists is almost as strong as the fear. Izuku knows he’s still hyperventilating, knows that he’s probably making the worst noises, but he still forces himself to speak before he passes out.

“Kay,” he says. “I’m--I’m okay,” he pants, and then the world feels like it drops away, feels like it sinks from underneath him into blackness.

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When Izuku wakes up, he expects nothingness. He expects blankness and blackness, expects quiet and pain. He opens his eyes, and he is blinded with a light that’s so bright it can only come from the sun. He gasps, his eyes slamming shut, but he moves, trying to turn over onto his side. He doesn’t feel handcuffs, doesn’t feel a strap at his feet, but he does feel warm hands trying to stop him, holding him still. Izuku fights against them, almost surprised when he can hear his own grunt of exertion as the person tries to hold him down.

“You’re--you’re going to rip out the IV,” the voice says, and it takes a moment for Izuku to place Haruta’s voice. “Midoriya I’m--I’m so sorry, but you--you have to hold still, okay? Just let me--let me adjust it, so you can roll over.” Haruta’s voice is so thick with guilt and pain that Izuku doesn’t have to be able to read minds to notice it. Izuku swallows, cracking one eye open. He doesn’t think he’ll be able to talk.

“I know,” Haruta says, his eyes lined with pain. “You don’t have to,” he says, and it sounds a little choked up, like he’s about to cry. Izuku thinks that *he* might cry, just from the fact that he’s able to hear that, that he’s able to see the blue of Haruta’s eyes. Izuku swallows, sticking out his tongue to wet his lips.

How long was I in there? He asks in his mind. Haruta bites at his lower lip.

“It’s about ten a.m. on Sunday,” Haruta says. “So, um, around ten hours.” Izuku blinks. It felt longer, felt worse. Izuku shifts, turning back towards Haruta, so that he’s not straining at the IV. He looks down at himself. He’s wearing one of the shirts his mom packed for him, a soft t-shirt, and he can feel some kind of sweatpants on his legs, but they’re covered by a thick blanket. Izuku recognizes his own room at the Gekkeiju tower, recognizes the way the sunlight spills through the window, around the curtains. Izuku catches sight of his wrists, and he sucks in a breath.

"I know they look bad," Haruta says. "But--but Recovery Girl will be able to help," he says. "I-I got your clothes from, from the basement," Haruta says. Izuku blinks. His wrists look like they've been cut over and over and then run through meat grinder, like they've been beaten and sliced and ripped. They look infected, too, puffy and red and angry, with spots that leak white pus. Izuku swallows.

"I didn't want to--to bandage them, with the infection," Haruta says. "I cleaned them, um, and I have--I have a habit of talking out loud," he says. Izuku looks over at him, because he knows Haruta, and Haruta *doesn't*. Izuku stares at Haruta, who swallows.

"I, um, I put your shirt and pants and shoes in your bag," Haruta says. "Which is under your bed. And I've been in here with you ever since you got injured." Haruta breathes out. "And the cameras here don't have microphones, so I've been telling the people on the other end, um, what's going on."

"Oh," Izuku says, and his voice sounds *awful*. "Are--are they...?" Izuku doesn't know what he's asking. Haruta looks to the side and down.

"We're allowed to leave, now," Haruta says. "Fury said to tell you that, um, your next mission is--is to get the quirk counseling documents from the pre-school by the--the park with the pool," Haruta looks at Izuku for a moment as Izuku tries to imagine the place. It takes him a moment, but he remembers it. Izuku swallows, dreading what he's going to have to do, what this might mean for those kids.

"I'm sorry," Haruta says, quietly. Izuku looks up at him. "If, um, if I'm the only one--the only reason you're still working here," Haruta says, looking down at his lap. "Please don't--don't do this for me." Haruta's eyes shut. "If you can--if Ema's safe, I can just--I'll just kill myself, and I'll be free," Haruta says. Izuku stares at him.

"Y-You can't do that," Izuku says, even though he knows he's a hypocrite. Haruta looks up at him with eyes that are puffy from hours of crying, from hours of staying up late. Haruta breathes in, out.

"I'm never--I'm never going to be okay again," Haruta says. "Not--not after this." His eyes stare into Izuku's. "You were alone for ten hours. I--" Haruta's lips twist into a grimace. "The longest I spent t--there was--was four days." Izuku feels his own eyes widen. He looks at Haruta, looking for a sign that he's lying, that that isn't true, but Haruta's eyes just look dead, empty.

"I'm not going to--if I'm alive, I'm never going to be free," Haruta says. "No matter where I-I go, how--how *safe* I am, Fury will haunt my dreams until the day I die." Haruta's eyes slide shut, his brows twitching with pain. "The least I can do is make sure that you get out before you're the same way."

Izuku sucks in a breath. He stares at Haruta, stares at this boy who has been with the Gekkeiju for a full year longer than him. This boy who does not get second chances, who does not have the reassurance that his mistakes can be wiped away. Haruta, who has endured this all alone for a year, when Izuku has so many people on his side, especially now. Haruta, who is ready to die. Haruta, whose eyes shoot open as he stares at Izuku with open confusion.

I won't let you, Izuku thinks. If you kill yourself, I'll turn back time over and over and over again until we find a way that you don't have to. If Fury kills you, I'll turn back time over and over and over again until he doesn't. Izuku meets Haruta's eyes, and he hopes that the other boy can feel Izuku's conviction, can feel his resolve.

“I won’t let you give up,” Izuku says, aloud. He thinks, just for the briefest moment, that he sees hope flash in Haruta’s blue eyes.

Chapter End Notes

content warning: torture, suicidal ideation, needles/medical stuff, unsanitary stuff, panic attacks/dissociation

[discord!](#) [carrd!](#)

if ur reading this, ur the pog to my champ.

distance

Chapter Summary

last time: izuku gets tortured in high definition for like a whole ass chapter

Chapter Notes

hi gamers how's it going im vibing just having an exist

also heads up this weekend (fri-sun) i might not be updating the usual amount, im going home for my mom's bday and passover :D

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Izuku is surprised at how well he's able to keep himself upright. Haruta only really had to support him for the first few steps out of bed, and by the time that he and Izuku are on the first floor, stepping out of the lobby and into the cold November air, Izuku is walking completely on his own. It doesn't mean that he feels *good*, but it's something. Izuku hates the feeling of the cold on his skin, hates the way that it briefly reminds him of the icy cold morgue, but the discomfort only lasts a moment, because Izuku can *see*. There's the smoky, cool grey of the sky above, the buildings and the ground, all hard concrete and dark asphalt. There's the honks of horn sin the distance and the whistling of wind between the buildings, the hum of electricity and of movement. Izuku can breathe out here.

They start to walk towards the train station in silence. Haruta has barely said a word since Izuku had promised that he wouldn't let him die, back in the bedroom in the tower, and Izuku isn't sure if it's because Haruta's angry with him or if it's something else. It makes Izuku's skin crawl, and he's not entirely sure why, but he thinks it might have something to do with the way that the sound of someone talking is something solid, something real that he can grab onto. He tries not to think too hard about that, though, because he doesn't want Haruta to feel guilty.

"I don't," Haruta says, quietly, startling Izuku out of his thoughts. "Not for--not for that, anyway," he says, casting his gaze down to look at the concrete in front of them. "It's my fault that you were isolated in the first place. I should have known better than--than to try and ask Fury to stop." Haruta's face is lined with pain, and Izuku swallows.

"It's okay," Izuku says, shrugging and tipping his head back to look up at the sky. "I mean, it--it isn't, but--it's not your fault." It isn't. It's Fury's fault, and more than that, Izuku thinks that it's Sasaki's fault, that she's created the monster that haunts Izuku's dreams. Izuku has started to see the similarities between Sasaki and the three lieutenants, in their small movements and the ways that they act, the tone of their voice and their body language. It might be the most clear in Fury, who seems to relish in pain the same way that she does.

"Sasaki doesn't like it when others are in pain," Haruta murmurs. "That's just Fury. Sasaki likes when--she wants *revenge* ." Izuku blinks, glancing at Haruta. "She wants heroes to suffer, because she thinks it's because--because of them that bad things happened to her."

“Oh,” Izuku says. “Do you know what--what happened to her?” he asks. Haruta shakes his head.

“She does a good job of, uh, controlling her thoughts,” he says, working his jaw. “I know about her sister, but only because--only because she did the same thing with the trigger to me,” Haruta says. Izuku blinks, then nods.

“Did you--did you see the same thing?” Izuku asks, and then he thinks about the doctor’s office, about Hotaru and their mother. Haruta blinks, shaking his head.

“No, she showed me when her and her sister were--I’m not sure where they were,” Haruta says, frowning. “But they were doing some kind of training, I think.”

“I wonder what happened to Hotaru,” Izuku says. He sees Haruta blink and open his mouth, but the other boy freezes, his gaze moving to look in front of them. Izuku follows his shocked gaze, and he sees Aizawa step out from around the corner they were about to turn down, marching towards them with a grim expression on his face and his capture scarf rustling in the wind where it’s wrapped around his neck.

“Sensei--” Izuku starts, but Aizawa reaches them before Izuku can ask what he’s doing there. Izuku sees the desperate look on Aizawa’s face, the bags under his eyes, the way that the whites of his eyes are shot through with even more red than usual. He reaches his hands out, like he’s going to grab Izuku, but he stops before Izuku even has the chance to flinch.

“Midoriya,” Aizawa says, his voice thick. “I do not care how much you want this to work or how many times you tell me you’re okay. The next time--” he pauses, swallowing thickly. “The next time I have to hear you scream like that, I’m coming to get you whether I can get a team assembled or not.” His lips are pressed into a thin, grim line. “Do you understand?”

Izuku blinks, looking at his teacher with what he’s sure are wide eyes. It takes him a moment, with Aizawa staring at him like his teacher is afraid he’ll disappear, and Izuku moves without thinking. He step forward, colliding with his teacher and wrapping his arms around Aizawa’s waist, hugging him. Izuku squeezes his eyes shut and shoves his face into Aizawa’s chest as he feels Aizawa’s hands slowly come to rest on his back.

“I understand,” Izuku says, muffled by Aizawa’s chest. He feels Aizawa give him an awkward pat with one hand, but the other grips him tightly, like he thinks Izuku might drift away if he lets go. Izuku doesn’t cry into Aizawa’s shirt, but it’s a near thing. He thinks that for right now, the warmth of his teacher, the movement of his chest as he breathes in and out, is enough for Izuku.

“Haruta,” Aizawa says, not letting go of Izuku. “You are *not* going to kill yourself,” he says, his voice harsh and firm. “I’m sorry, Haruta. I should have--I should have seen this earlier,” Aizawa says, and Izuku can hear the crack in his voice. “I should have noticed, and I should have helped you. I’m *so* sorry.” Izuku hears his teacher breathe out, like he’s letting out a breath he’s been holding. Izuku can’t see Haruta, but he can hear him take a few steps closer.

“It’s--it’s not your fault,” Haruta murmurs, quietly. “It still--I still would have gotten hurt,” he says, and his voice sounds like he’s about to cry, like his throat is thick with tears. Izuku pulls back, away from Aizawa, just enough to turn and look at Haruta. Izuku doesn’t need to be able to read minds to know that Haruta wants to reach out and hug them, too, but that he’s afraid. Haruta’s eyes are teary, the skin underneath his blue eyes rubbed red from having cried too much over the past few days, and when he steps forward, raising his hands, they’re shaking.

Izuku is the one who pulls Haruta into a hug first. He’s not sure if it’s because Izuku, suddenly, needs the comfort from the older boy, or if it’s because Izuku can tell it’s what Haruta needed, but

he does it anyway. Haruta is thin and fine-boned, and he's trembling when he wraps his arms around Izuku. Izuku glance over at Aizawa, who's watching them with a pained expression.

"We're going to be okay," Izuku says, into Haruta's hair. They're about the same height, but Haruta has sunk down slightly, hunched over. "We're going to be okay." Izuku can't tell if he's reassuring Haruta, Aizawa, or himself. It might be all three.

Aizawa walks them to where his car's parked, drives them back to campus. There's something nice about being with his teacher and with Haruta instead of in public, alone yet surrounded by prying eyes. Izuku almost wishes that he could give up on the Gekkeiju, could stop going back, but he doesn't dare. Not until Haruta's safe, not until Haruta will be able to stay alive, too.

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Izuku sits on the edge of the bed in the infirmary, swinging his legs back and forth over the white tile. He can hear murmurs of conversation that get steadily louder and louder as Aizawa, Recovery Girl, and his mom get closer to him. He and Haruta are on adjacent beds, but there's a curtain drawn between the two of them, so all Izuku can see of him is a shadow. His vision of the infirmary staff is blocked, too, but it doesn't bother Izuku, not when he can hear clearly who's coming. He wonders who they'll treat first.

"Haruta," Izuku asks, keeping his voice low so that the whole infirmary won't hear. "You got hurt before I even got there, right?"

"Y-Yeah," Haruta says, quietly. Izuku can see him reaching up and rubbing the back of his neck with one hand. His silhouette looks more cat-like that he does when Izuku can see all of him. "It's not that bad, though," he adds. Izuku knows he doesn't have to voice his doubt.

"Let's see what we have here," Recovery Girl says, warning Izuku before she and Aizawa step around the curtain. Izuku gives him a shaky smile, and he holds up his wrists.

"It's j-just this," he says. He knows that Aizawa had seen them, on the trip back, but the teacher hadn't pressed Izuku on them, just looked at them when he thought Izuku wouldn't notice. Now, he doesn't try to hide his dark gaze.

"Hm," Recovery Girl hums, reaching out and taking Izuku's right wrist gently. She turns his hand over, examining the circle of cuts and bruises. "This looks quite painful," she says, tutting. "How much sleep were you able to get last night?"

"He was in and out for about eight hours when I--when I was with him," Haruta says. "I don't know if--if he slept while he was in the morgue, though." Izuku blinks, watching Haruta's form through the curtain.

"Wait, you were with me for that long?" Izuku asks, his brow furrowing. "Did you--did you get to sleep?"

"Um, not--not really," Haruta replies. "They let you out around two a.m., s-so..." he trails off, and Izuku does the math in his head. It makes sense. There's no way that Izuku *didn't* sleep outside of the morgue, if it had been ten hours and they left around ten in the morning. They'd arrived at the tower too early for that.

"And Kojima said you were on fluids," Recovery Girl says. Her use of Haruta's last name confuses Izuku for a moment, before he remembers.

"Y-Yeah," Izuku says. Recovery Girl nods, leaning forward and planting a kiss on Izuku's

forehead. He feels a wave of exhaustion, enough to make him blink and fight the urge to yawn, but not enough to knock him out completely.

“There you go,” Recovery Girl says, giving him a quick smile. “You need a good meal and a bucketful of therapy, but you won’t scar,” she says, her eyes moving down to Izuku’s wrists. Izuku looks down. The skin is smooth, unmarred. It’s like it never happened. Izuku takes one hand and feels the wrist of the other, feeling his skin, smooth and warm.

“I can call and have someone bring something up,” Aizawa says, and Izuku looks up to see that he’s watching Izuku. “What do you want to eat, Midoriya?”

“J-Just some rice and soup, please,” Izuku says, stifling a yawn behind one hand. He doesn’t want to stress his stomach after not having eaten. He sees Aizawa’s eyes narrow.

“Okay, but you’re eating more in a couple of hours,” Aizawa warns, pulling his phone out and typing on it. Izuku hums in agreement, feeling his eyes starting to slide shut. The infirmary bed suddenly seems so comfortable, so soft underneath him. Izuku could use a nap.

“Kojima, dearie, where are you hurt?” Recovery Girl asks from behind the other curtain. Izuku turns to watch, but his attention is dragged away when his mom walks up to him.

“Hey,” she says, her voice a little weak as she gives Izuku a small smile. “Feeling alright?” Her gaze darts down to Izuku’s wrists.

“Yeah,” Izuku replies. He wants to listen in on whatever Haruta and Recovery Girl are saying, but their voices drop low enough that it’s hard for Izuku to make out their words. He focuses on his mom instead, only looking away for a moment when Aizawa steps to the side, holding his phone up to his ear as he walks out of the room.

Inko looks tired, her eyes a little too puffy for her not to have cried. Izuku wonders, briefly, if she was listening in when Izuku was being tortured, but he doesn’t think that’s likely. She’d be far more upset if she’d heard the noises he’d made firsthand. Instead, it just looks like she was up all night worrying, like she’d scrubbed at her eyes one too many times.

“Do you--are you feeling up for your surprise?” Inko asks, fidgeting with her hands. Izuku blinks. He’d almost forgotten his mom telling him that she had a surprise for him when he returned. He nods, quickly.

“Y-Yeah, that’d be good,” he smiles. He needs something to cheer her up, something to reassure him that he’s okay even after all of this. Plus, it couldn’t hurt for Izuku to have something good. He feels okay right now, but he has a sneaking suspicion that he’ll stop feeling okay when he has a chance to think about what happened, when he’s alone in the dark or the quiet.

“So, I, um, I just got approved as Mouse’s foster mom,” Inko says, biting her lower lip and smiling as she looks at Izuku. “It’s--it’s temporary, for now, but if none of her family can be contacted, well, I’d like to try and adopt her, if that’s okay with you,” she says, her smile growing wider by the minute. “I’m going to--to move into the faculty dorm here, too, so that you don’t have to worry about if I’m safe, and so that Mouse will be somewhere that the villains can’t get to her.” Izuku stares at his mom, his lips parting slightly.

“F-For real?” Izuku asks, blinking. When Inko nods, her smile wavering as she takes in the shock on Izuku’s face, Izuku launches himself at her, pulling her into a tight hug.

“Thank you, Mom,” Izuku says, squeezing her and ignoring the harsh sting of tears in his eyes.

“That’s--that’s amazing.” Inko hugs him back, her arms feeling the same as they always have. She holds him differently than Aizawa had, with a softer grip and one hand on the back of his head, the other on the center of his back, between his shoulderblades. She holds him with the same shaky fear that Aizawa had, though, like she thinks Izuku might disappear.

“I’m glad,” Inko says, her voice a mumble in Izuku’s ear. “I was worried that you might not like it, but I just--I couldn’t let her go to a family that didn’t know her, that might not love her.” Inko sucks in a breath, the sound loud in Izuku’s ear. “I’m so glad you’re okay, baby,” she whispers.

“I-I know, Mom,” Izuku says. He pulls back a little from his mom, then, just enough to see her face, streaked with relieved tears. “Can I, um--can I see Mouse?” Izuku asks, fidgeting with the hem of his shirt. His mom’s face splits into another smile.

“Of course, baby. Present Mic is watching her and Eri right now,” she says. Izuku blinks.

“Eri?” he asks. He knows about the girl that had been rescued during the raid on the Shie Hassaikai, but he hadn’t heard anything about her being on campus. His mom nods, looking back over her shoulder at the door that Aizawa had stepped out of.

“Aizawa is fostering her, like I’m doing with Mouse,” Inko explains, turning her head back to look at Izuku. “We were a bit worried about them playing together, given how dangerous their quirks can be, but from what I’ve heard it’s been going well.” Her smile crinkles the edges of her eyes. “You should probably rest for now, but we can go see them when you’ve eaten and slept, okay?” Inko reaches out, setting a hand on Izuku’s. Izuku doesn’t flinch back from the touch, doesn’t even feel a flicker of fear, and it says something that he’s proud of that, but he’s not sure what.

“Okay,” he breathes. He sits with his mom, waiting for a hot meal and a soft bed.

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Mouse is a heavy, warm weight on Izuku’s lap where she’s sleeping. Izuku is sitting on Aizawa and Mic’s couch, with the girl draped across his thighs, snoring softly. The lights in the room are off, but the bathroom light spills out onto the floor, illuminating the space just enough that Izuku can see Eri, curled up in a pile of blankets on the floor, her hands clutching at the fabric. Sitting in an armchair across from Izuku is Aizawa, looking at Izuku with something that could be exhaustion, or fondness.

Mouse has already started to gain weight in just the few short weeks since she was rescued, and it makes her look more her age and less like a much younger child. Her cheeks look fuller, too, and she’s got a flush to her face that she hadn’t had before. She’s still streaked with soot in places, but it’s only from one day’s worth of ash, and her hair is clean and soft, a pile of dark curls. She’s wearing a long sleeved grey shirt and a pair of black basketball shorts that come down to just above her knees, along with a pair of heatproof gloves so that she can use her quirk while doing whatever she wants and not worry about melting things.

“They look so young when they’re asleep,” Izuku says, his voice the faintest whisper. Aizawa raises an eyebrow at him.

“They always look young,” Aizawa replies. Izuku shrugs, reaching down to brush a loose eyelash from off of Mouse’s cheek.

“I have a sister,” he says, softly. Aizawa’s face doesn’t move except for his eyes, which shift down to look at Mouse.

“That you do,” Aizawa says, sighing softly under his breath. “How are you holding up?” he asks. Izuku grimaces.

“Okay, I-I guess,” Izuku says. He runs a hand through Mouse’s hair, feels the almost feverish heat that fills her. “I think--I think it’ll be fine until I’m alone,” he admits. Aizawa watches him for a moment, then nods, slowly.

“I would expect as much,” Aizawa says. “I don’t want to send you back there.” Izuku sighs.

“I know,” he says. Aizawa watches him, his face tired and worn. “But I have to go.”

“You don’t, though,” Aizawa says. “Haruta and Ema can stay on campus. They’ll be safe here.” Aizawa’s lips stretch slightly, into something that might be a frown or a grimace or a scowl. “You shouldn’t be the ones doing this. You and Haruta are too young.”

Izuku shrugs. “Nobody else--nobody else *can*,” he says. Mouse feels like a heating pad on his lap, or a particularly heavy cat. It’s hard to believe she’s really the little girl that he’d risked his life to save, that he’d really, truly *saved* her.

“That’s not true,” Aizawa says. “There are other people.” He sighs, reaching up a hand to run it through his hair. “Midoriya, I--”

“I don’t want to--I don’t want to argue about this right now,” Izuku says, trying to keep his voice low and quiet. “I just want to rest.” He looks down at Mouse, but he still sees Aizawa’s throat bob as he swallows.

“Okay,” Aizawa says. “This isn’t fair to you, you know that.” Izuku glances up, sees the way Aizawa is staring at him, something burning in his dark eyes. He looks almost desperate, pleading, and Izuku doesn’t understand it.

“I chose this,” Izuku replies, his voice quiet, hollow. “If it’s unfair, it’s my fault.” As the words leave his lips, Aizawa shuts his eyes, his head bowing slightly. He opens his eyes, stares at the ground.

“It’s not your fault, Midoriya,” Aizawa says. “None of this is your fault.”

Izuku doesn’t reply. He doesn’t know how to. Instead, he sits with his hand in Mouse’s hair, with her head on his lap. He listens to the quiet sounds of her breathing, of Eri shifting in her sleep. He listens to the pops of his teacher’s joints as Aizawa stands up, staring at Izuku for a long moment before he goes to the sink in the corner of the room and starts to wash dishes. They don’t say anything else, but Izuku feels like they need to, even though he feels like he missed what the conversation was actually about in the first place.

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“I have some exciting news for all of you,” Aizawa says, his voice completely deadpan and nothing that even remotely resembles excitement. He’s standing at the front of the classroom, his back to the blackboard and a smear of chalk on his cheekbone where he’d scratched an itch. Izuku’s been wondering when someone would point it out to him, or if Izuku would have to be the one to do it.

“Do you think we’re going on a trip?” Kaminari whispers from his seat, leaning towards Kacchan. “Like to somewhere cool?”

“Shut up,” Kacchan hisses back, glaring daggers at Kaminari. Izuku can’t say that he agrees with

Kacchan's methods, but he feels strangely relieved for Kacchan to quiet Kaminari. He isn't exactly sure why, though.

"We'll be having a school festival in about a week and a half," Aizawa says, his eyes on Kaminari. "You'll be expected to prepare some kind of booth for the other classes. I'll leave it up to you to decide what that will be," he says, his gaze moving over the class. Izuku notices the way his gaze lingers a little too long on Izuku, like he's considering saying something to him, but if that's the case, Aizawa must change his mind. He steps to the side, sinking onto his chair and leaning back, shutting his eyes.

"We should totally do a maid cafe, guys," Kaminari says, excitement clear in his voice. "Yaomomo can make the costumes, and Satou and Bakugou can make the food. It's perfect!"

"What would the rest of us do?" Shinsou asks, rolling his eyes. "Look pretty?" Kaminari turns to him, nodding excitedly.

"Exactly! It'll be really hilarious to have all of us in the costumes, and it'll be super fun and lighthearted. We don't want to do something too serious after all of the stuff that's happened this year," Kaminari says. Izuku blinks. Kirishima starts to say something, pulling the attention of the class, who aren't quite over the boy's hospital stay, but Izuku finds it hard to focus.

It feels silly. Izuku doesn't know how he's supposed to seriously plan something like this, how he's supposed to come up with an idea for a festival, how he's supposed to commit any of his time to it, when he knows full well that he'll be spending his evenings getting information for a criminal organization and his weekends being tortured while he prays that his teacher doesn't come and stop the torture, lest he has to kill himself. He can hear Uraraka and Kirishima worrying about if their festival booth will be enough to cheer up the other classes, if it'll be comforting to them, and Izuku wants to laugh.

He doesn't mean to be dismissive, but what his classmates have been through feels so small, compared to everything that's happened to him. He remembers the USJ, of course, remembers the way that Aizawa and Thirteen had been willing to give their lives to save them, the way that Izuku's friends would have been seriously hurt, but even with that, Izuku lived it so many more times than his friends did. With Stain, too, Izuku had to go through it multiple times, had to watch Iida live through various amounts of pain. He had to watch his friends suffer, and he had to die to go back and fix things.

Izuku remembers the summer camp. He remembers the way that he and Neito died in each other's arms, the way that the two of them had to fight tooth and nail to win. Even then, Izuku is the one who pushed Neito out of the way. He's the one who was in the hands of the Gekkeiju for a week, while Kacchan was rescued by *All Might*, the hero who told Izuku he couldn't follow his dream. Izuku doesn't have to remember the raid, really, because it's so fresh. He knows that Kirishima and Tsuyu and Uraraka could have died, could have been seriously injured, but Izuku can't help but think that would have still been easier than what he had to do.

And now, Izuku isn't alone, but in many ways, he still is. He thinks about Haruta, about Haruta's shaking hands and his long, silver hair. He thinks about the burns that he's never seen but knows are there. He thinks about Mouse and Ren, about the cream-colored basement. He thinks about the morgue.

I probably have more in common with Miura than I do with my classmates, he thinks, and it's a horrible thought, one that sinks into his chest like a pressing weight, but he can't deny that it might be true. Miura has been hit by Fury, has been burned and beaten and bruised. She knows his quirk. Haruta and Ren are the same way, know that same pain. All of his classmates, worried about who

should do what in the festival, if they'll look bad on stage or in certain outfits--Izuku feels like he can't relate to them. He feels like he doesn't belong, not here. He stands up.

"Deku?" Uraraka asks, her brow furrowing slightly. "Is everything okay?" Izuku glances over at her, at the look of concern plain on her face. Izuku smiles.

"I'm fine," he says. "I'll be right back." He turns and walks from the classroom, his classmates' conversations continuing behind him. Izuku steps into the hallway, sliding the door shut behind him. The sounds of talking are muffled, but not silenced. The hallway is still filled with chatter, bright and loud and clear. Izuku sucks in a deep breath. He sits down beside the door to the classroom, his back pressed into the cool surface of the wall.

Izuku keeps his eyes open, watching the reflection of the light in the tile floor, watches his own blurry, warped form. He breathes in and out, listening to the sounds of his friends talking, but he can't make out any specific words. It's strangely peaceful, but Izuku feels distant from it all, like he's floating alone, outside his body. He feels like he's in the sky above, high above the cloud where it's blue and clear and sunny. He imagines that the air up there is cold and sweet, soothing and fresh.

"Midoriya?" Izuku looks up to see Aizawa, standing in the doorway. He looks tired, the bags under his eyes heavier than usual, but not more than they had been the past few days. Izuku swallows.

"Sorry, sensei," he says, but he makes no move to get up.

"Are you okay?" Aizawa asks, ignoring his apology. Izuku pauses, thinks about it, then nods.

"I just--the festival, it's so--" Izuku cuts himself off, swallows. He wets his lips with his tongue. "It feels silly," he says. Aizawa's eyes soften slightly, and he nods.

"You don't have to participate," Aizawa says, tilting his head slightly to the side, "but it might be good for you. You deserve a break."

Izuku sighs. "I'll think about it," he says, pulling his knees up to his chest and resting his chin on them. "I feel like--I feel like I'm on another world," he murmurs. "I don't--I can't relate, not anymore."

He hears a sigh, and he looks up to see Aizawa step out of the doorway, stepping to stand beside Izuku and sliding down the wall so that he's sitting next to Izuku in roughly the same position.

"I felt the same way, when my friends all became daylight heroes," Aizawa says, his voice quiet. He's looking out at the hallway, not at Izuku. "They all saved people from easy things--fires, accidents, robberies. I saved people from torture, from assault, from trafficking. It started to get to me," Aizawa says, turning his head to look at Izuku. "It's isolating. But you have to find people you can talk to, people you can spend time with, or you'll go insane. You can't do this alone," he says, firmly. Izuku nods, slowly.

"I can talk to--to you," Izuku says, biting at his lower lip. "And Haruta and Neito and Kacchan, even though they don't all get it." He swallows. "Shinsou and Todoroki, too." Aizawa nods.

"Good," he says, then pauses. "You can have an alternate assignment," he says, and Izuku blinks.

"L-Like what?" Izuku asks. Aizawa meets his gaze, his lips quirking up into a small smile.

"Someone will need to watch Mouse and Eri," he says. "And I'm sure they'd love for you to show them around the festival." Izuku stares at his teacher for a moment before his own face shifts into a

grin.

“I can do that,” Izuku says, warmly.

Chapter End Notes

content warning: medical stuff, dissociation, reference to past torture

[discord!](#) [carrrd!](#)

i hope you enjoyed!!! i appreciate all of the support and all of the nice comments!!!
also about criticism--i appreciate constructive, polite feedback. if you're going to be
rude i will be rude back to you. remember im a human being pls. think before you
speak <3

T – is it true?

H – is it helpful?

I – is it inspiring?

N – is it necessary?

K – is it kind?

that's for the people who feel the need to act like grade schoolers in my comments.
everyone else, keep on pogging. you're amazing and i love you. i read every comment
and it makes my day to see them. idc if it's an essay or like three words or you're just
telling me about your day, every (not rude) comment is valued :D

sleep

Chapter Summary

last time: infirmary fluff, mouse fluff, and school festival is mentioned

Chapter Notes

sorry for the shorter chapter, i have a KILLER headache and just want to sleep :')

also!! I've been thinking about some feedback i've gotten and i've made some adjustments to some of the future plot plans to reduce plot holey-ness :D i don't think it'll be too jarring, but the stuff i've adjusted/added obviously couldn't be foreshadowed in earlier chapters like i would normally do, so hopefully it's not too obvious what i've done dfjghdfkjg. none of it Blatantly shows up this chapter tho

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

It feels strange for Izuku to be sliding on his goggles in front of Aizawa, but everything has been kind of strange for a while, now. Izuku positions the strap on his head, then tugs up the hood of the jacket over his head, covering the back part of his hair and the back of his neck. Aizawa is watching him from a short distance away, fiddling with the edge of his capture scarf.

“Ready?” Aizawa asks. Izuku nods. He wonders what this is like, for Aizawa to see him, Izuku Midoriya, turning himself into the vigilante known as Ace.

“All that’s left is to--to leave campus,” Izuku says. He pats at his belt, confirming the presence of his knives. His hand lingers a moment over the pocket that holds his wire. Aizawa’s gaze drops to Izuku’s hands, clearly noting the movement.

“I’ll be listening, but Haruta and I will be having a meeting in about thirty minutes,” Aizawa says. Izuku blinks, glancing meaningfully out the window. It’s dark outside, with the crescent moon and the glittery stars illuminating the dark backdrop of the night sky. Aizawa sighs.

“He’s worried about someone listening in,” Aizawa explains. “I don’t blame him, with his quirk.” Izuku nods.

“You’re not patrolling tonight, are you?” Izuku asks, thinking that if his teacher is, they should plan to patrol different routes. Aizawa shakes his head, his eyes narrowing slightly.

“Are you patrolling after you retrieve the files?” Aizawa asks. “You won’t have much of a chance to sleep.” Izuku shrugs, looking down at the floor. The room they’re using, a meeting room on the first floor of the building that houses Nezu’s office, is carpeted, but the navy blue fabric looks almost grey in the fluorescent lighting. It’s strange, seeing it like this, because during class, the entire building is flooded with natural light, too, even on the stormiest of days. It looks almost unnatural, this way, like Izuku is looking at a low-quality photo of the room instead of the real thing.

"I like patrolling," Izuku says. Aizawa grunts, which Izuku assumes is some form of agreement.

"Nezu wants you to report to him what you find as well as what you plan on telling the Gekkeiju," Aizawa says, reaching up to scratch at the scar under his eye. "He said he'll help you to plan what you should share with them." Izuku nods, swallowing.

"Is he--is there a plan to, um, to take them down?" Izuku asks. It's something that's been on his mind for a while, ever since he rescued Mouse and Ren. The two people Izuku has left to save, Miura and Haruta, aren't at the tower full-time. A raid wouldn't necessarily put them in danger, and Izuku has been feeding them information on the Gekkeiju members' quirks, on their names and ranks. Aizawa breathes out, his shoulders sagging slightly. His gaze turns to the side, glancing out the window.

"There is a plan," Aizawa says. "It's probably not what you're hoping for, though." His lips shift slightly, like he's grimacing but trying not to. Izuku swallows.

"Can you--can you tell me what it is?" Izuku asks, even though he's pretty sure he already knows the answer. Aizawa shakes his head, a small movement that makes his dark curls shift nonetheless.

"Not yet," Aizawa says. "And I'm not exactly happy about that fact." He shifts his gaze to look at Izuku. "If it were up to me, you and Haruta wouldn't be going back there, and we'd have already taken out the Gekkeiju." Aizawa does grimace, now. "There are... complicating factors," he says, speaking slowly, like he's trying to avoid saying something he isn't allowed to. Izuku nods.

"R-Right," Izuku says, his voice quiet even in the almost-silent room. "I'm gonna--I'm gonna head out, now," he says. He swallows, waiting for Aizawa to protest, to tell him there's something else, but Aizawa's face softens.

"Be careful out there, Ace," he says. "And try to get some sleep tonight. If you're nodding off in homeroom tomorrow, I'll make you go and take a nap during your morning classes." Aizawa's lips quirk up into a small smile, and Izuku blinks, before he smiles, too.

"I'll try," Izuku says. He gives Aizawa a wave as he walks over to the door, the soft fabric of his costume rustling with the movement.

--

Izuku is in a thick, inky blackness, a type of darkness so deep that it clings to him like liquid. Like sludge, even; Izuku hasn't thought about his first death in a long, long time. He thinks about it now, though, about the way that the sludge had shoved its way down his throat, the way he hadn't struggled, hadn't fought back. Izuku wonders, now, as he floats on his back through nothingness, if that was worse than this. If pain is worse, or if nothingness is. He doesn't know.

Izuku can feel his sight leeching away, his ability to see his own hands as he holds them in front of him fading. He clears his throat, blinking, trying to dispel the ink from his eyes, but it won't leave. Izuku cannot see, and as he sinks into something that feels cold and wet and sticky, he cannot hear, either. Izuku struggles, tries to move, but he can feel the sharp bite of the handcuffs digging into his wrists, can feel the strap holding down his ankles.

Izuku screams, the sound ripping out of his throat and into the space around him, coming out as a short, startled yelp. He jerks upright in bed, his skin covered in a thin sheen of cold sweat as he leans forward, wrapping his arms around his knees as he brings them up to his chest. He can feel that way his arms are shaking, the way every line of his body is burning and aching with a kind of pain that he knows isn't from anything physical. Izuku buries his head in his knees, shutting his

eyes, but he straightens up and opens his eyes again almost as soon as he does. The darkness, even if he knows its just from shutting his own eyes, is overwhelming.

Izuku throws the covers off of himself, swinging his legs out of bed and walking quickly to the window, jerking the curtain to the side. Moonlight spills in almost immediately, and Izuku sighs, relief filling him as he hears the sound, a breathy noise that's clear and loud in the quiet of the room. Izuku swallows, sinking to the floor.

It doesn't matter that he's exhausted, that every bone in his body is aching for sleep after spending night after night patrolling and working on his mission for the Gekkeiju. It doesn't matter that this is the first night this week that he *hasn't* gone out, that Aizawa had ordered him to stay home and rest tonight, threatened to take him out of classes for the day if he didn't. It doesn't matter that Izuku would honestly much rather be asleep, so that he doesn't have to think, so that his mind will stop drifting to handcuffs and cold water and quiet, quiet, quiet.

It doesn't matter, because Izuku can't shut his eyes without feeling a throb of panic in his chest. He'd been *fine* after the morgue, really--he'd been so tired after patrolling that his brain hadn't had the energy to dream, and really, even with the lights out and the curtains drawn, his room is still brighter and louder than the morgue was. Izuku can hear the hum of the heater, can hear the sounds of the wind outside, brushing against the building. If he listens hard enough, he can even hear the chirping of crickets and cicadas where they lurk outside, in the forest and in the lawn.

But now, with the dream of ink and silence fresh in his mind, Izuku doesn't dare try to sleep. He sits like that, his arms wrapped around his knees and his eyes open despite the itchy, scratchy ache they have from being awake too long, until the sun starts to peek about the horizon. He watches the moon and the stars and the puffy clouds, dark grey shadows in the dim light of the moon. He watches the trees in the woods, watches them shift and ripple in the wind.

Izuku waits until the dark, navy blue sky has turned a pale grey, with pink and pale blue and creamsicle orange streaked across it, and then he rises. He stretches, listening to his joints pop, and he walks to his dresser. He figures he should probably get ready for the day ahead of him.

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Izuku stares down at his bowl of curry, inhaling the sweet scent of cooked vegetables and heavy spices. His mouth waters at the taste, but as he dips a spoon into the bowl, mixing the sauce and the vegetables with the steamed rice, he can feel his eyelids drooping slightly. *I should have tried harder to sleep last night*, Izuku laments. He's not sure if it would have *worked*, but then at least he'd feel less like an idiot who pulled an all-nighter on purpose, or something.

"Deku, are you okay?" Uraraka asks, leaning forward over the table to fix him with a worried look. "You look like you're about to fall asleep in your lunch..." she says, frowning. Izuku gives her a smile, shaking his head.

"I'm fine, don't worry," he says. "I've just been having trouble sleeping lately is all." He scoops up a spoonful of curry and shoves it in his mouth, hoping to use it as an excuse not to answer any more questions. It helps that it tastes nice, too. There's something about spending tons of time exercising that makes food taste extra nice, and between hero training and patrolling as Ace, Izuku thinks he spends more time being active than most people spend awake. He has to stop himself from snorting out a laugh at that one--he *definitely* needs more sleep.

"We can tell," Shinsou says, giving Izuku an unimpressed look from where he's sitting beside Tsuyu. Izuku's not entirely sure when Shinsou started joining them for lunch, but he seems to fit right in, between Tsuyu and Iida. Izuku has Todoroki on his left, dutifully eating his cold soba.

Todoroki sets his chopsticks down for a moment, looking up at Izuku.

“Are you having trouble staying asleep or falling asleep?” Todoroki asks, tipping his head to the side slightly. Izuku swallows. *I don't really want to explain*, he thinks, but he doesn't want to brush his friends off, either.

“Staying asleep,” Izuku admits, looking down at his food. It doesn't look as appetizing, anymore. He wonders if his friends would worry if he took a nap instead of eating.

“Um,” a voice behind Izuku says, startling Izuku slightly. Izuku jerks upright, twisting in his chair to see Haruta standing behind him, his hands collapsed in front of him, his lips in a worried frown. “C-Can I talk to you for a minute, Midoriya?” Haruta asks, shifting back and forth on his feet nervously. Izuku blinks, then nods.

“S-Sure,” he says. Haruta looks behind Izuku, probably at his friends.

“Uh we can--we can go outside?” Haruta asks, biting at his lower lip. “It's--it's personal,” he says. Izuku swallows.

Is it about the Gekkeiju? he thinks. When Haruta nods once, just enough for Izuku to notice it, Izuku grabs his tray, lifting it up as he stands.

“I'll see you guys in class,” Izuku says, turning to look at his friends and giving them a smile. Uraraka and Iida frown, while Tsuyu and Todoroki just look contemplative. Shinsou raises an eyebrow, slowly.

“Bye, Midoriya,” Tsuyu says. Todoroki nods, and that's enough of a send-off for Izuku to not worry about making his friends worry too much. Izuku walks towards Haruta, who turns and starts to walk towards the doors out of the cafeteria.

“Is everything okay?” Izuku asks quietly, his voice low enough that only Haruta would hear. He can see Haruta's cat ears twitch when Izuku speaks, just before Haruta turns his head back to look at Izuku over his shoulder.

“I don't know,” Haruta murmurs, his voice almost completely inaudible. He reaches out, pushing open the doors that lead from the cafeteria to the lawn outside. He moves quickly through the doors, stopping to hold them open for Izuku. Izuku realizes that Haruta isn't carrying a tray, and he wonders if the older boy has already eaten.

“I'll get extra at dinner,” Haruta says absentmindedly, casting a gaze around himself. Izuku takes the moment to look around, too, but there doesn't seem to be anyone paying them any attention. Izuku walks over to a tree, a tall oak that's lost most of its leaves. He sits down underneath it, settling onto the cool ground. It's not too cold out today, with the sun shining down from a bright blue sky and warming Izuku's skin. Haruta sits down beside him, drawing his knees up to his chest and wrapping his arms around them. Izuku takes a bite of curry, then pushes his tray towards Haruta.

“Have a few bites, at least,” Izuku says when Haruta looks up at him, an expression of surprise on his face, blue eyes wide. “You shouldn't go to classes on an empty stomach,” Izuku says, nodding at the tray. Haruta sighs, reaching out and grabbing the chopsticks from off of the tray.

“General studies doesn't have physical training,” Haruta says, but he grabs a clump of white rice anyway. Izuku watches him bring it to his mouth, chewing on it. He wonders, briefly, if Haruta has any dietary restrictions because of his cat features, but Izuku pushes that out of his mind. Haruta

had called him here for a reason.

“What’s going on?” Izuku asks, worrying at his lower lip. Haruta swallows, looking up at Izuku and grimacing slightly as he sets the chopsticks down on the tray.

“I-I, um, I’m getting a new mission this weekend,” Haruta says, his gaze on the ground in front of him. “I don’t know--don’t know what it is, but Fury texted me,” Haruta says, reaching up to brush a lock of silver hair away from his face. “I’m--I’m worried about what it might be,” Haruta says, his voice dropping until it’s almost inaudible. Izuku blinks.

“Why--why are you worried?” Izuku asks, frowning. “I-I mean, other than the part that it’s Fury,” he amends. Haruta sighs, glancing up at Izuku.

“I-I’m not totally sure, but Fury--he’s the one who asked me to start training with Shinsou and you,” Haruta says, turning his gaze back to the ground with a heavy sigh. “At first, it was--it was just to have more access to Aizawa-sensei’s thoughts. But Fury--he likes Shinsou’s quirk, and I don’t--I don’t like that he likes it.” Haruta reaches out, picking at the grass beside his legs. Izuku blinks, swallowing.

“That’s...” Izuku breathes in, out. “That’s not good,” Izuku says, not sure of how to express just *how* bad this might be. “Do you think--do you think they’re going to try and kidnap him? Like with--like how they tried to kidnap Neito?” Izuku asks, biting at his lower lip. Haruta shrugs.

“I don’t know,” Haruta says. “But that’s what I’m afraid of.” He blinks, looking up, past Izuku, and he whispers. “Change the topic. I-I don’t--I don’t care what,” he says, quickly. Izuku blinks, but he opens his mouth to speak, anyway.

“I don’t know what we’re doing for the--for the festival,” he says. “I think that--that they decided on a musical thing? But Aizawa-sensei asked me to watch Eri and Mouse, so I can’t--I won’t be participating.” Izuku swallows, not sure if he should turn around and see whoever Haruta must have heard coming. He’s not sure if it would look more suspicious to turn and look, or if he should act like he doesn’t know.

“Is there something going on?” Shinsou’s voice sounds from just behind Izuku. Izuku turns to look at him, to see the scowl on his friend’s face. “I didn’t think we had training this week,” he says, his eyes narrowing slightly. Izuku blinks, but it’s Haruta who answers.

“There isn’t,” Haruta says, tipping his head to the side slightly. Shinsou’s eyes narrow.

“I didn’t think you two were friends,” Shinsou says, slowly. “And I doubt that talking about the festival is the *personal* thing you had to ask Midoriya about,” he says, folding his arms over his chest. Izuku blinks, swallowing.

“It--it wasn’t,” Izuku says. “And we’re--we’re friends.” Izuku casts a glance over to Haruta, who nods, giving Shinsou a shaky smile.

“I’m not--we’re not training without you, Shinsou,” Haruta says, and Izuku can see the way Shinsou stiffens. “I’m sorry if it--if it seemed that way.” Shinsou snorts.

“Something’s going on,” Shinsou says. “But whatever. You don’t have to tell me about it,” he says, and he turns on his heels, marching away. Izuku swallows, feeling uncomfortable, like there’s ice dripping down his spine.

“He’ll be okay,” Haruta murmurs. “He--he thinks we were talking about him,” he says. Izuku frowns, biting at his lower lip.

“We were,” Izuku says in reply. He looks down at the half-empty bowl of curry, not feeling quite so hungry any more.

“Not the way he thought we were,” Haruta mumbles. “I’m sorry, Midoriya. I don’t--I don’t mean to mess things up with your friends.” Haruta shifts slightly, his hands pulling at the blades of grass between them. Izuku watches him do it, feeling uneasy.

“You’re one of my friends,” Izuku says, quietly. Haruta doesn’t reply, just wraps his fingers around a clump of grass and tugs it out of the ground. Izuku swallows, feeling something heavy settle in his gut.

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Izuku is drifting off when he hears the knock at his door. His head is resting on his desk, his cheek pressed into the textbook he has open in front of him. The edges of the book dig into his skin, and when Izuku blinks his eyes open blearily and pulls away from the book, the paper stick to his skin slightly. He rubs at his cheek, feeling a mark pressed into the flesh as he stands up from his desk, shuffling through his room, towards the door.

“Coming,” he mumbles, yawning wide as he unlatches the lock, twisting the doorknob with his other hand. He’s not sure who he’s expecting, really, but he blinks in surprise, waking up the rest of the way when he sees Neito and Kacchan standing side by side in his doorway.

“Hey,” Neito says, raising a hand in a lazy wave. There’s his usual grin on his face, and beside him, Kacchan is wearing a deep scowl. Izuku looks between the two of them, blinking as he tries to put together what’s going on.

“H-Hey,” Izuku says. “What’s--what are you two doing here?” Izuku watches as Kacchan’s eye twitches.

“What the fuck does it look like?” Kacchan growls, and Izuku has to step out of the way to avoid being slammed into as Kacchan stomps into the room. Izuku gives Neito what he hopes is a very confused look, to which Neito just shrugs and grins, raising his hands and exaggerating the motion of the shrug.

“I ran into him on my way over,” Neito says, and then he steps into the room, too. He’s not wearing a coat, which makes Izuku a bit suspicious of his claim that he just ‘ran into’ Kacchan, but Izuku doesn’t bother questioning it. He shuts his door, turning to watch as Kacchan plops down into Izuku’s desk chair and Neito hops up onto his bed, his socked feet swinging and brushing against the ground.

“Um,” Izuku starts, but he pauses, not sure of what to say. Both Kacchan and Neito look at him, red eyes and blue eyes aimed at Izuku’s face. After a moment, Izuku sighs, walking across the room and hopping up onto his bed beside Neito. The bed is made neatly, hiding any signs that Izuku had been up, twisting and turning, all night last night.

“Well?” Kacchan asks, tapping his foot impatiently. “What the fuck do you two do when you hang out?” Izuku blinks, hearing Neito snort beside him.

“We usually play cards and talk, *Kacchan*,” Neito says, rolling his eyes. Izuku swallows, expecting Kacchan to start setting off explosions and yelling, but all that happens is a vein twitches in his temple and his eyes narrow.

“Don’t fucking call me that,” Kacchan growls. “Where are the cards, then?” he asks, waving a

hand impatiently. Izuku can't help but sigh. *This is a waste of time*, Izuku thinks. *I could be sleeping, studying, or working on something to help with my work as Ace. I don't have time to play games.* Izuku watches as Neito pulls a deck of cards from his pocket, the same battered, worn deck that he and Izuku have been using for months, now. He slides them out of the box, shuffling them easily without looking.

"You know, it's considered rude for someone to invite themselves into something they aren't part of," Neito says, his eyes on Kacchan. Kacchan rolls his eyes.

"You don't want me to leave, Copycat," Kacchan says. His gaze slides over to Izuku. "And what the fuck is wrong with you, anyway? Cat got your tongue?" Kacchan's eyes narrow, slightly, and Izuku wonders if Kacchan had heard about Izuku talking to Haruta, or if he's just saying that by coincidence. Izuku is too tired to really know for sure.

"I'm just tired," Izuku says, a sigh in his voice. He sees Kacchan and Neito exchange a glance, and Izuku feels like he's missed something.

"Have you been sleeping?" Neito asks, tipping his head to the side slightly. Izuku swallows.

"Y-Yeah," Izuku says, and Kacchan snorts.

"Yeah, right," Kacchan says. "You've got bags under your eyes worse than fucking Aizawa's." Kacchan pauses, his eyes narrowing again. "You can't lie to me, nerd." Izuku squeezes his eyes shut. He doesn't want to deal with this, not right now.

"Can I--can we do this some other time?" Izuku asks, sighing. "I--I just--I don't feel like--like I'm up to it, right now," he says, guilt already sinking heavy in his chest. He expects to see anger on Kacchan's face and disappointment on Neito's, but when he opens his eyes, it's to the two of them exchanging worried looks. Izuku blinks as Neito turns to him.

"Maybe you should try to get some rest," Neito says, his brows furrowing slightly. "One or both of us could stay here, if that would help." Izuku watches Kacchan pause, then nod, and that's when Izuku has had enough.

"When did--what happened between you two?" he blurts out, glancing between the two of them. Kacchan blinks, his red eyes startled, but Neito starts laughing after a moment, tipping his head back.

"Izuku, you were--you were in the hospital, remember?" Neito says, giving Izuku a smile and shaking his head. "Bakugou was the only one other than me who had any kind of idea about your quirk, so of course we talked," Neito says, shrugging. "He's obnoxious, but it's fun to argue with him. He gets angry, and it's hilarious to watch." Neito smiles, an impish grin, and Izuku hears a growl coming from Kacchan.

"That's because you're fucking terrible," Kacchan snarls. "It's not *arguing* if you're just insulting me, idiot. That's a logical fucking fallacy." He bares his teeth at Neito, leaning forward against the back of Izuku's chair. Izuku blinks.

"Oh," he says, and then he smiles, slightly. "You're--you're friends," he says, looking up at Kacchan. "Right?"

Kacchan's eyes narrow, and he looks down and to the side. He doesn't reply, but he doesn't have to, a blush rises on his cheeks, bright red against his pale skin, and, out of the corner of his eye, Izuku can see Neito smirking, his blue eyes gleaming. Izuku lets out a breath he hadn't realized

he'd been holding.

"Aren't you guys going to be b-bored, if you're just watching me sleep?" he asks, fidgeting with his hands in his lap. Neito shrugs.

"Not really," he says. "Blasty will study, I'm sure, and I have plenty of stuff to read on my phone." Izuku blinks, glancing over to Kacchan, who seems to think on it for a moment before he nods.

"Yeah, it won't be as awful as actually *talking* to you," Kacchan says, shrugging. Izuku breathes out, biting at his bottom lip.

"O-Okay," he says. He doesn't make any move to lie down, though, and after a moment, Neito seems to realize that Izuku isn't doing anything. He sighs, scooting closer to Izuku.

"I'm going to touch you," Neito says, meeting Izuku's eyes as he does. Izuku nods, giving him permission, and Neito wraps a hand around Izuku's shoulder, tugging him down so that he's lying across Neito's lap. Izuku's head is resting on one of his thighs, and he has a perfect view of Kacchan when he snorts and rolls his eyes.

"That's gay," Kacchan says, giving Izuku and Neito what might be a dirty look.

"Oh, shut up," Neito says, and Izuku knows without even looking up that Neito is rolling his eyes, too. Izuku smiles, slightly, and he lets his eyelids fall shut. It's only a few moments before he's asleep, the sounds of quiet conversation soothing him and keeping his anxiety far, far away.

Chapter End Notes

content warning: uhhh ref to torture, nausea

[discord!](#) [carrd!](#)

thank you all for being my little pogchamps. keep on gaming folks!

wires

Chapter Summary

last time: izuku talks to haruta, shinsou thinks it's gossip. neito and kacchan vibe with izuku

Chapter Notes

SORRY FOR NO CHAPPIE LAST TWO DAYS!!! i was at home for passover and my family wanted me to hang out and stuff!! i hope i didn't worry anyone too too much

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“You know,” Aizawa says, sighing and running a hand through his hair, “neither of you have to go back there.” Izuku watches his teacher look between Haruta and Izuku. His teacher looks worn and tired in a way that goes beyond just not sleeping, concerned and weary in a way that Izuku knows is more than just what comes with a dangerous mission. Izuku swallows, looking to the side, where Haruta meets his gaze with damp blue eyes. Izuku doesn’t know what Haruta’s thinking, but Izuku thinks that, whatever Aizawa is hiding from them, they have to go back.

“We’ll be--we’ll be okay,” Izuku says, dragging his gaze away from Haruta. “I haven’t worked under Manami, yet, but she--she can’t be as bad as Fury,” he says. Judging by the way Aizawa’s brows furrow, the way his lips twist, it’s not helping Izuku’s case any.

“I’m getting a new mission, tomorrow,” Haruta adds, squirming under Aizawa’s gaze. “It--Fury won’t punish me, not when I haven’t--haven’t had a chance to mess up, yet,” Haruta explains. Izuku knows that that isn’t *strictly* true, that Haruta could probably still manage to anger Fury, but it occurs to Izuku that Haruta is probably fairly well-equipped to avoid doing that. *He can hear what Fury’s thinking*, Izuku reminds himself.

“Still,” Aizawa says, his voice firm. “You don’t have to go,” he says, just as the door to the meeting room opens, the doorknob clicking. Izuku turns, looking behind him, to see Nezu walking into the room with his customary smile on his face.

“I would really rather they did go,” Nezu says, his eyes gleaming as he shuts the door behind him. “The Gekkeiju are quite dangerous. The information Midoriya and Kojima give us is priceless, really.” Izuku swallows when Nezu meets his gaze with dark, beady eyes. Izuku wonders if his nerves are showing on his face.

“But they aren’t being forced,” Aizawa says, and when Izuku looks over to him, he’s staring Nezu dead in the face. “Nobody will *make* them go.” Izuku is struck with the sense that he’s missing something, that there’s something going on beyond what Aizawa and Nezu are actually saying. Izuku doesn’t think it’s accidental, that Aizawa is doing this now, in front of Haruta. Izuku glances over to Haruta, who meets Izuku’s eyes and nods, ever-so-slightly. Nezu seems to notice the movement, his eyes narrowing slightly.

“Let’s save that for later, shall we?” Nezu asks, directing the question at Aizawa. Aizawa doesn’t seem like he’s planning on answering, and Nezu continues, turning to look at Izuku and Haruta. “Midoriya, you still have your wire, correct?” Izuku nods, and Nezu hums. “Good. Kojima,” he says, reaching into his pocket and producing a device identical to the one that had been given to Izuku, last week. “Here’s yours. I’m sure you know how to use it.”

Haruta reaches out, taking the small, metal device. He stares down at it, in his palm, and Izuku watches as his friend tucks it into the pocket of his uniform blazer, looking up at Nezu again. Izuku can tell from the way Haruta’s eyes narrow, his lips pressing together, that Nezu is telling him something through thoughts. Izuku wishes, briefly, that he had Haruta’s power, but he dismisses the thought. *His quirk is what got him kidnapped in the first place*, Izuku thinks.

“Midoriya,” Aizawa says, and Izuku turns to see his teacher staring him down, a serious expression on his face. “I know I’ve already said it, but I want to make this very clear. If you’re being tortured--” he pauses, his gaze moving to Haruta, then back to Izuku, “--if *either* of you are being tortured, I don’t care how many times you say you’re okay. I’m coming to get you.” His dark eyes are serious, but Izuku can’t help but wonder if that would even work, if Aizawa alone would be able to get them out of the tower before he was killed, or before the Gekkeiju figured out what was going on and tightened their claws around Izuku and Haruta.

“O-Okay,” Izuku says, swallows. As much as Izuku knows Aizawa is trying to help, in some ways, it feels like his teacher is just making things more difficult, making it so that Izuku has to be absolutely certain that he isn’t tortured, or Aizawa will be put in danger. Izuku can see Haruta shoot him a glance, but Izuku pretends not to notice.

“Well, it sounds like that’s all settled, then!” Nezu says, clapping his paws together. “Why don’t you two boys go and get some rest? You’ll want to be well rested for tomorrow,” he says, like he’s talking about sports game or an exam, not the two of them going to the base of notorious villains. “Aizawa and I need to talk about some things,” Nezu finishes, his gaze drifting over to Aizawa. Izuku watches his teacher’s eyes narrow.

“We do,” Aizawa says, but he sounds hesitant, like he doesn’t want to dismiss Izuku and Haruta just yet. Izuku glances over at Haruta, who nods, slightly.

“We’ll--we’ll go get some sleep,” Izuku says. Aizawa looks at him, then nods. Izuku and Haruta filter out of the room quietly, but Izuku knows he’s not the only one who thinks there’s something else going on with Aizawa and Nezu.

--

“You’ll--you’ll be okay?” Izuku asks, hesitating in front of the reflective doors of the tower. Haruta glances over at him, a grimace on his face. Izuku’s noticed that he started shaking a few blocks back, that the closer they got to the Gekkeiju’s base, the more scared he looked, the more he drew into himself. Izuku might not know what he’ll be facing with Manami, but he knows for certain that Haruta will be seeing Fury, and Izuku knows what that’s like.

“Yeah,” Haruta says, his throat bobbing as he swallows. “I-I’ll be fine,” he says, giving Izuku a weak smile. Izuku doesn’t believe it for a second, but he also knows there’s nothing he can do, not now. Izuku takes a breath and pushes open the doors to the tower with the hand that isn’t holding his bag, stepping inside.

Yamamoto is typing away at the computer, like usual, but leaning up against her desk and watching Izuku and Haruta enter is Manami. Her bright red hair is up in its usual pigtails, and she’s wearing the school uniform that Izuku’s seen her in before, a pale grey blazer and skirt with a white

button down and pink thigh-high socks that show a thin gap of skin between the skirt and the tops of the socks, skin covered in cuts. She's not wearing any shoes, and her steps are nearly silent as she pushes herself away from the desk and skips forward to stand in front of Izuku.

"Hi!" she chirps, brightly. Izuku notices that her amber eyes have the heart-shaped pupils that mean she's used her quirk on herself. "You ready?" Manami tips her head slightly to the side, grinning just wide enough that her teeth show. Izuku swallows, casting a glance over to Haruta.

"Y-Yeah," Izuku says. It's strange, for her to meet him down here. With the others, with Fury and Miura and Sasaki, Izuku had always been told where to go by Yamamoto, had always had to go up to meet them himself. Izuku isn't sure if this is unsettling him, or if he's just nervous about Manami, unsure of how she'll treat him.

"Great!" Manami says, reaching out to grab Izuku's hand, the one that isn't carrying his duffel bag. Izuku remembers her quirk too late, when her hand is already closing around his, and he barely has a chance to brace himself before he feels the strange distortion of colors, the sensation of going down the biggest hill of a rollercoaster or of nearly falling out of his chair. He blinks away the colors, the nerves that had been boiling in his gut suddenly overwhelming. Izuku swallows. His mouth is painfully dry, and he can feel himself shaking.

"Oops," Manami says, and Izuku watches her frown for a moment before she seems to perk up, tugging Izuku forward by his hand, towards the elevators. Izuku shuts his eyes for a moment, trying to calm his fast-beating heart, but he still feels sick with anxiety. It doesn't help when he hears the elevator beep at them, and he opens his eyes to see Manami pulling back from the button that calls the elevator.

"I'm pretty excited to work with you," Manami says, looking over at him and smiling. "Most of the people I work with are old and gross, y'know? And you're pretty cool I think! Sumimi likes you, so I know we'll get along great," She bounces on the balls of her feet, and Izuku feels confusion bleed into his anxiety, mixing with it. He swallows, his brow furrowing.

"How--how old *are* you?" he asks as the elevator doors open. Manami, still holding his hand, tugs him into the elevator, and Izuku can feel his heart rate spike, can feel the sharp pull of anxiety in his chest. He pulls his hand away from Manami, taking a few steps back to press his back against the wall of the elevator. It's cool against him, even through his shirt, but it's just grounding enough that Izuku doesn't feel like he's going to start swaying. He can hear his own breathing, harsh and fast in the small space, as Manami looks over to him, tipping her head to the side and putting a finger up to her chin.

"I'm seventeen," she says. "Are you afraid of elevators? They don't usually stop working, you know." Izuku can see her rocking back and forth on her heels as she leans forward, pressing the button for the sixth floor. Izuku swallows, forcing himself to concentrate on breathing, in and out. He wraps both hands around the strap of his bag, squeezing the fabric tight between his hands.

"I'm--I'm not afraid of--of them f-failing," Izuku says, his voice coming out in pieces. "It's--it's what--what comes after," he says. Manami glances over to him, blinking.

"Oh," she says, and then the hearts in her eyes twitch and fade, her eyes returning to normal. She sighs, low and slow, and Izuku swallows, wondering what that means for him, if she's angry. His heart won't calm down in his chest, even though he'd only normally be a little bit nervous, and it reminds him of being around Maka. *My emotions are amplified*, he thinks, but it doesn't help him to calm down.

"What--what makes your quirk stop?" Izuku blurts out as the elevator chimes, the doors sliding

open. “Can you--can you please turn it off?” he asks, his voice pleading. Manami hums, stepping out of the elevator and into a familiar looking hallway. The sixth floor is set up almost identically to the seventh floor, but the decor is different. Izuku glances around nervously as Manami speaks.

“Nope,” she says, turning and watching as Izuku steps into the hall. “I can’t turn it off on purpose, sorry.” She sounds genuinely apologetic. Izuku stares at the walls, which have abstract paintings on them, the colors all red and orange and bright, neon violet. “You have to calm down on your own,” she says, and Izuku swallows as he follows her down the hall in front of them, headed towards the large, floor-to-ceiling window. At the end of the hall, there’s a long table, and it’s laden with potted plants, much like on the seventh floor. Instead of being ivys and greenery, though, the pots all seem to be holding orchids of various colors and sizes. There’s a blue spray bottle of water sitting on the wood table, and Izuku can tell that it’s used a lot from the way it’s nearly empty.

Izuku stares at the orchids and counts his breathing as Manami fumbles with the lock on the door she’s standing in front of. Izuku breathes in for four, holds for four, and breathes out for another four. Square breathing, just like Aizawa had taught him. It takes a moment, his heart slowing and calming in his chest, but when he calms down, when he wrangles in his nerves until he doesn’t feel anything at all, he can feel the quirk releasing. It feels like he’s taken a blanket off, like he’s opened a window, and Izuku breathes a sigh of relief just as Manami opens the door to the room.

“There we go!” she says triumphantly, opening the door outward. Izuku blinks, peering into the room, but it’s dark inside. Manami skips inside, flicking on the lights as she does, revealing a small room with a thick, rich, red rug covering most of the ground. The center of the room is taken up by a cream colored couch, much like the ones on the first floor, with a glass-top coffee table in front of it. The couch faces the back wall, away from the door, which has a large television on it, the screen dark. The other walls seem to be made up of bookshelves, much like other rooms in the tower, but there aren’t any books on the wall.

Izuku follows Manami into the room, his gaze catching on the bookshelves to his right. The shelves are filled with what seems to be medical supplies, including many, many bottles of what appears to be medication, in both white screw-top bottles and the orange plastic prescription bottles that come from pharmacies. Izuku can see clear bags filled with transparent liquid, boxes with English text on them, bandages, gauze, ointments and creams, and many other things that he doesn’t recognize. None of it is organized, and everything’s strewn across the shelves seemingly randomly, but there isn’t a speck of dust on anything.

“Checking out my stash?” Manami asks, a giggle in her voice as she leans on the back of the couch, resting her hands on her hips. “Do you know English?” she asks, tipping her head to the side and looking thoughtful. “They teach you guys in school, right?” Izuku blinks.

“Um, I-I know a little,” he says, chewing on his bottom lip. “Not--not medical stuff,” he says, his eyes darting to the other shelf, the one to his left. It seems to be filled mostly with files and folders, with stacks of paper interspersed with brightly colored sticky notes. Much like the medical supplies, it looks entirely unorganized, but clean. There’s still a lot of empty space on both shelves, mostly near the top. Izuku can’t really see those shelves, but considering that Manami is only barely taller than him, she probably can’t, either.

“The medical words are the best, though,” Manami says, pouting slightly. She pauses for a moment, then waves a hand. “Shut the door and come in. I don’t bite,” she says, grinning. Her teeth are normal, not fanged or sharp or large, but for some reason Izuku had expected them to be unusual, like Sasaki’s. Izuku swallows, reaching out to pull the door shut behind him. When he turns back around, he sees that Manami’s moved to sit on the couch, sitting facing him, backwards

on the couch.

“So how’d the mission go?” Manami asks, looking at Izuku with wide, yellow-orange eyes. “You were just getting quirk info on some kids, right?” Izuku nods, feeling strangely uncomfortable. It’s strange, the way Manami is talking to him casually, the way there’s nothing threatening about her expression or her body language, yet she sets him on edge. *She looks like Fury*, Izuku realizes, blinking. Not just the hair color, either--even though her eyes and skin are both darker than his, their faces have a similar shape, similar features. Izuku wonders if it’s that that’s making him uneasy, or if it’s the fact that she’s killed him multiple times already.

“I-I have the information,” Izuku says, setting his bag down on the floor. He crouches down and tugs open the zipper, pulling out the papers he’d copied the information onto. He hadn’t even needed to kill himself after this infiltration; the security at the school had been next to nothing, really. He would have taken the papers themselves, if he didn’t think they’d be missed.

Izuku holds up the stack of papers, then realizes that Manami is still sitting on the couch. Izuku swallows, taking a few steps forward, and he hands them to her. He stays far enough back that their hands won’t touch, even by accident. Izuku doesn’t really want to fight off her quirk all over again.

“Thank you,” Manami says, her voice sing-song. She holds the papers in her hands, balancing them on the back of the couch as she looks down, reading them. Izuku watches, nerves building in his chest as Manami flips through the pages, pausing at each one. Her eyes move side to side quickly, like she’s reading, and it occurs to Izuku that if Manami is seventeen and has been with the Gekkeiju for eight years, she probably never went to school. *She’s Haruta’s age*, Izuku realizes, swallowing. Izuku wonders how she learned to read, how she learned enough English to be able to read the text on the medical supplies. He wonders if Fury or Miura or Sasaki taught her.

“This is good,” Manami murmurs, flipping over the last page. “Where’d you get these? The principal’s office?” Izuku swallows.

“Y-Yeah, the elementary school, um, keeps records in the office,” Izuku says. Manami nods, reaching her hand up to press her thumb into her lips. Izuku can see the colorful distortion that marks her quirk, but Manami doesn’t even blink when it activates, doesn’t seem to even notice. Her pupils turn back to hearts, like they were when Izuku first arrived.

“I’m impressed!” she says, looking up at him and smiling. “You should go back and try to see if you can get teacher’s records on the students, things like parent teacher conference notes and stuff.” She scoots backwards, hopping off the couch and over to the bookshelf with the papers. “Next is seeing who’s like, actually a viable target, and you can get an idea of who we can get based on what the teachers notice about them,” she says, sliding the papers onto a stack of other papers. She turns back to Izuku, smiling like she isn’t talking about kidnapping elementary schoolers for their quirks.

“O-Okay,” Izuku says, swallowing. “Um. All of them?” He’d looked at all of this year’s quirk counseling reports, but he’s not sure he’d be able to write down all of the teacher’s notes. Manami hums, tilting her head to the side.

“Hmm, maybe just a few of these? I’ll go through in more detail and text you a list tomorrow, but for sure the ones with mental type quirks,” she says, nodding as she speaks. “That’s mostly the kind of thing we’re looking for right now, you know? We’ve got enough firepower with Sumimi,” she says, then pauses, her brows furrowing. “Actually, with Hina-chan dead, we could use another fighter.” Izuku blinks, confused.

“Hina?” Izuku asks. Manami’s eyes refocus on him, and she blinks, the hearts fading from her

eyes. Izuku remembers that the quirk fades whenever emotions reach zero, and he guesses that if there's nothing really going on, there's nothing to stop the quirk from fading quickly.

"Oh, I guess you never met," Manami says, shrugging. "Hina Suzuki. We called her Dollface, though," Manami says, and Izuku swallows. *Dollface*. Izuku tries not to think about her, tries not to think about Mouse shooting her for Izuku, tries not to think about the long walk home, through the city and the suburbs. Even though Manami can't read minds like Haruta can, Izuku doesn't want to risk reacting visibly.

"Oh," Izuku says, then frowns. "Did she--how did she die?" Izuku asks, tipping his head to the side like he doesn't already know the answer to that question.

"When the hero lady broke in and stole Mousey, she shot Hina-chan," Manami says, puffing out her cheeks and frowning, like she'd lost a toy or broken a dish, not like someone had died. Izuku hesitates for a moment, then nods.

"I'm sorry," Izuku says, because he's not exactly sure what he's supposed to say. Manami shrugs, smiling.

"It's fine!" she chirps, bright amber eyes meeting Izuku's. "Everyone's gonna die eventually, anyway." She moves back across the room, walking between the couch and the coffee table and then over to the other bookshelf, the one full of medical supplies. Izuku watches as she stands on her tiptoes, reaching up to pull an orange prescription bottle off of a higher shelf. She unscrews it, tipping two round blue pills into her hand.

"Do you want one?" she asks Izuku, tipping her head to the side. Izuku swallows, shaking his head.

"Uh, I'm--I'm good without, thanks," he says. Manami nods, seeming unbothered, and she tilts her hand until one of the pills falls back into the bottle. Manami screws the cap on the bottle and replaces it on the shelf before turning her head to look at Izuku again.

"You can go now, if you want," she says, a smile on her face. "I'll text you who I want teacher's notes on by tomorrow, and you should get that info before we meet next week." She tips her head at him, like she's nodding him goodbye. Izuku stares back at her.

"That--that's it?" he asks, swallowing heavily. Manami blinks, looking confused.

"Yeah," she says. "Is there... something else you needed?" she asks, twisting her lips as if thinking. Izuku pauses, then shakes his head.

"No, I'm--I'm okay," he says, reaching for the doorknob and turning it, backing out of the room. "Thank you," Izuku adds, because he feels like it's what he's supposed to do. Manami smiles and waves as Izuku steps out of the room and shuts the door behind him, listening to the quiet whir of the heater in the hallway, to the sounds of the wind whipping the building outside.

Izuku pauses there for a good moment, just breathing. He's not sure why it's unsettling to him, why he'd almost rather than someone burned him or tortured him or broke his wrist, but this--this feels wrong. Izuku has to stand there, telling himself this isn't a trick, until he can calm the beating of his too-eager heart.

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When Izuku arrives in the Musutafu train station, it's started to rain. It's just a light, weak drizzle, the kind of rain that makes him feel cold and a little damp but nothing else, but it's raining nonetheless. Izuku hurries from the train station into the shelter of a nearby awning, where he tugs

out his phone and wipes the screen dry with the sleeve of his hoodie. It doesn't do much other than smear the tiny pinpricks of water into a film, making the pixels of his phone screen glow rainbow-bright behind the water.

Izuku finds Aizawa's number, hitting call rather than bothering to text. He knows that Aizawa is listening, knows that his teacher knows nothing dire is going on, probably even knows that Izuku is off of the train station, but still, Aizawa had said to tell him when they were in Musutafu. Izuku knows that, were he try to type with damp fingers and a damp screen, he'd just mangle the words, the water messing up the touch screen of his phone. Izuku presses the phone to his ears as it starts to ring, the sound quiet with the voice of the wind and the city around him.

"Hello?" Aizawa's voice comes from the other side of the call, distorted by the phone ever-so-slightly. Izuku sighs, somehow relieved that his teacher picked up, even though Izuku knows that's not a surprise.

"Hi," Izuku says. "I-I got out early--um, kind of, anyway." He glances up as the sound of heavier rain starts to fill the space, like a blanket of white noise. "I'm in Musutafu, which you probably already know, but I just wanted to--to let you know. I would have--would have texted, but it's hard to use my phone in the rain," Izuku explains, talking perhaps a little more than he really needs to. He hears Aizawa's answering hum on the other side of the call, then some rustling.

"It's pouring," Aizawa says, his voice a mumble. "I'm going to send Hizashi to pick you up. Haruta is still at the tower, so Nezu and I need to stay here to listen," he says, his voice gruff. Izuku swallows. He isn't sure if he wants to know what's going on with Haruta or not, but he needs to ask anyway, or he'll spend the entire rest of the day worrying.

"Is he--is Haruta okay?" Izuku asks, his voice sounding small and childish. A drop of water, cold and fat, drops from the awning above, landing on the center of Izuku's head, in the part of his hair. It trickles down Izuku's scalp as he tilts his head back, looking up to see a large, mildewed crack in the concrete of the overhang. Izuku takes a step back, putting himself out of the way of the leak.

"He's..." Aizawa sighs. "The situation could be worse," he finishes. Izuku swallows.

"Are they--is Fury torturing him?" Izuku asks. There's a moment when static crackles on the other end of the phone. Izuku wonders if Aizawa is switching hands, trading the phone off to put it to his other ear.

"Not quite," Aizawa says. "You can ask him more yourself when you're both home safe, problem child," he says with a heavy sigh. "I messaged Hizashi, and he's on his way. Text him your location when we get off the phone, unless you're still at the station." There's a pause. "Midoriya, are you okay? No injuries, nothing like that?" Aizawa asks it hesitantly, like he's not sure that he should be asking. Izuku swallows.

"I'm okay," Izuku says into the phone receiver. "Nothing--nothing even happened." As he says the words, he's filled with a prickling anxiety that rests just below his skin, but he can't place why. Shouldn't it be a good thing, that Manami didn't hurt him?

--

Izuku waits in the infirmary for Haruta to come back to UA, even after his mom has finished checking him over and deemed him unharmed. Izuku's not surprised, really, considering that he hadn't gotten hurt, but his mom had been beyond relieved. Aizawa had dropped by, briefly, as if just to see that Izuku really was all in one piece, but he'd disappeared soon after, his face dark and tired. Izuku had wanted to ask if he could listen, if he could hear what was going on, but he didn't

dare ask. Izuku isn't sure if he'd be able to stay calm if he heard Fury's voice coupled with Haruta's tears, with a shaking in his voice.

Izuku's sitting in a chair by the door, picking at a bowl of rice and fish with his chopsticks. It's long since cooled to the point where he *could* eat it, if he wanted to, but something feels so wrong about eating, about being safe back at UA, when Haruta is very likely in pain. Izuku swallows, moving his bowl to the side and setting it on the tray he'd brought it in on, which is sitting in the chair next to him. Izuku looks over the bottle of water and the green apple resting on the tray, but after a moment, he decides to just wait. He doesn't think he can stomach it right now.

The sound of the door opening beside him almost startles Izuku enough for him to yelp, but not quite. He does jump, though, and he can see his mom perk up from where she's waiting in a chair beside the exam table. The door swings open, and Izuku stands just in time to see Aizawa march into the room, leading Haruta inside. Haruta's face is stained with tear tracks and his lip is split, like he's been punched in the mouth. Izuku can see that his hands are shaking, and Izuku wonders, briefly, if Haruta's hurt anywhere else.

"You're back," Inko says, standing up from her chair and taking a step forward. "Have a seat, I want to take a look at your lip," she says, her lips pressing together into a frown. Haruta nods, keeping his eyes on the ground and walking over to the exam bed. Izuku looks up at Aizawa as Inko starts to fuss over Haruta.

"Is he okay?" Izuku asks, quietly. Aizawa raises an eyebrow.

"Why don't you ask him that?" Aizawa asks, his voice flat. Izuku swallows, and when he glances over at Haruta, the other boy is already watching him out of the sides of his eyes, grimacing as Inko dabs at the cut on his lip with a square of gauze.

"I'm--I'm okay, Midoriya," Haruta says. He looks exhausted, the bags under his eyes a deep violet-grey, but he looks fine, physically. Izuku wonders, then, if the way that Aizawa is still holding himself stiffly and frowning is because Haruta had come back injured at *all*, or if Aizawa had heard something over the wire. Izuku watches Haruta's gaze slide away from Izuku's eyes, moving back to look at the ground.

"He's upset about my mission," Haruta says, quietly. Izuku can see Aizawa's gaze snapping up to look at Izuku, but Izuku keeps his eyes on Haruta.

"What's--what's your mission?" Izuku asks. Haruta swallows visibly, his eyes shutting for just a moment. Izuku feels dread start to build in his chest, making his breathing feel constricted, feel tight.

"He wants me to--he wants me to figure out Shinsou's exact schedule," Haruta says, his eyes fixed on the ground. "I'm--I'm supposed to tell them when he--when he plans on leaving campus next," Haruta says, his voice growing quieter, stilling to almost and whisper. Izuku stares at him, feeling his eyes opening wider. In the corner of Izuku's vision, Aizawa presses his hand over his face, hissing out a frustrated, pained breath. Izuku breathes out, his heart thudding in his chest.

"They're going to kidnap Shinsou," Izuku says. He raises a shaking hand, running it through his hair. "They're going to take him."

content warnings: references to torture, drug use

[discord!](#) [carrd!](#)

i hope you enjoyed!!!! im gonna try to update a little earlier in the evenings and go to bed earlier so hopefully you'll start seeing chapters around this time instead of 2-4 hours later like they used to be :D

price worth paying

Chapter Summary

last time: izuku meets up with manami, gets mission info from her, and returns to UA

Chapter Notes

hi gamers it's a monday and life is pain but at least i have blnt OCs to keep me alive

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Izuku is drowning. His body feels heavy and light at the same time, like he's floating in dark liquid, but it isn't unpleasant, doesn't make his lungs burn and doesn't make his head ache. There's a warmth seeping through his body that starts in his ribs, spreading through his chest and over his limbs. Izuku feels safe. He feels safe and warm and sleepy and euphoric, good in a way that he's never felt before.

Except, Izuku realizes, *I have*. Izuku blinks, the darkness that he opens his eyes into unyielding and oppressive. Izuku tries to breath in, tries to hasp in a breath of air, but he finds he can't speed up his breath or slow it down or anything. Izuku can't do anything against the helpless sensation of calm, of rest and safety. It feels like a cage around Izuku, gripping his skin and his body and his mind. Izuku struggles, kicking out into the nothingness, twisting his body, and--

--and he falls out of bed, landing on the floor with a thump. Izuku gasps, pushing himself off of his rug, the fibers sticking to the layer of cold sweat that covers his skin. Izuku squeezes his eyes shut, turning onto his side and curling in on himself. Even though the Heaven in his dreams hadn't been real, hadn't come from Fury's quirk directly, there's that same shaky pain that lingers in his bones, that sensation of loss where he doesn't have that glowing, soft pleasure any more. Izuku gasps for breath as he presses his hands into his face, focusing on the sensation of his skin on his face and not the way he's craving Heaven like it's a drug.

I'm okay, Izuku tells himself, forcing himself to breathe slow, even breaths through his fingers where they cross over his mouth. His breath feels hot and damp, making the small space by his face feel uncomfortably humid. Izuku lies there for a few moments, breathing in around the pain in his bones, before he slowly, tentatively uncurls his hands from his face.

Izuku's room is filled with pale light leaking out from underneath his curtain, the kind of soft moonlight that reminds him of being out as Ace, as exploring the city or walking through the woods at night. Izuku focuses on that, on the shadows that dance over his rug, rather than the images that keep flashing through his mind, golden eyes and the inky blackness of a blindfold. It doesn't make any sense to him--if he'd dreamed of Heaven, why is it the morgue and Fury's angry glare that haunts him now?

Izuku counts his breaths. He counts the inhale, waits through the exhale, and repeats until his mind isn't spinning, until the cold sweat on his skin has dried to a thin layer of salty grime. Izuku pushes himself off of the rug, the fibers soft under his shaking hands, and he crawls back into bed. He

grabs his phone off of the table beside his bed, unlocking it and squinting at the brightness of the light

Izuku doesn't know why he finds Todoroki's contact. Maybe it's for the same reason that he'd texted Todoroki in the past, when he'd killed himself with the fumes from mixing chemicals. Maybe it's because he doesn't expect Todoroki to be awake, that he doesn't think Todoroki will come running to check on him. Izuku isn't entirely sure why, but he still types out his message, eyeing the clock in the corner that tells him it's past two in the morning.

Do you get nightmares? Izuku texts Todoroki. He stares at it for a long moment. It's a stupid question, one he would probably answer with a lie if someone asked him. He doesn't really expect an answer, even as he stares at his phone, but he doesn't feel surprised, either, when the message goes from *delivered* to *read*.

I do, is Todoroki's reply. *Are you okay?* Izuku swallows. He types out a reply, his hands no longer shaking, more just... unsteady. The room feels cold, even under his covers, and he wonders if he should ask Aizawa to turn up the heater tomorrow night.

I am now, Izuku replies, his fingers moving quickly over the keys. *How do you sleep?* Izuku doesn't think about his texts before he sends them. *I can't get any sleep at all.* Izuku pauses. He shouldn't have sent those--it's too much. Izuku scrubs a hand over the front of his face as he waits for Todoroki's reply. In the morning, he can pass it off as being too tired from a late night.

It takes time, is what Todoroki sends. *I sleep better when I'm more tired in the evening. I try to use up all of my energy during the day*. Izuku notices that Todoroki doesn't say it gets rid of the nightmares, just that he sleeps better. Izuku thinks about it, swallowing and shutting his eyes for a moment. He rests better when he's been out as Ace, when he's spent more of the night running around than he does trying to sleep, but it's not a long term solution. Izuku hardly sleeps three or four hours on the nights he's out as Ace--it isn't enough.

Thanks, Izuku sends anyway. *I'll try that.* He pauses, then sends one more text. *Is that why you're awake right now, too?*

Yes, Todoroki replies. *You should try to get back to sleep. I'm going to, soon.* Izuku nods, before remembering that there's no way for Todoroki to see that, not over the phone.

Okay, Izuku replies. *Sleep well*.

You too, Midoriya, comes the reply. Izuku sets his phone back on his side table, and he wraps himself with his comforter, turning to face the wall.

--

When Izuku arrives at the meeting room, his hands hovering over the doorknob, he can hear the muffled sounds of voices from within the room. He recognizes Aizawa's gruff voice, but the rest of the voices all blend together. Izuku swallows as he turns the knob, pushing the door open. *I wonder if I'm the last one here*, he thinks to himself as he steps into the room.

This is one of the larger meeting rooms, with a large, oval-shaped table surrounded by multiple office chairs. The carpet is a pale, friendly green, and the walls are a clean shade of beige. It gives the room the illusion of being something friendly, not somewhere that they're meeting to discuss Shinsou and the Gekkeiju wanting to *kidnap* him.

Sitting in a chair not far from the door is Aizawa, twisted in his seat to look at Izuku as he walks

into the room. Nezu is a few seats away from Aizawa, with a bottle of water in front of him and a police officer that Izuku doesn't recognize to his left. The police officer is a plain looking young woman, with shoulder length brown hair that's pinned away from her face, and she hardly catches Izuku's eye compared to the man sitting to her left.

The man is dressed in a dark suit, the kind of neat, tailored clothing that the Gekkeiju would wear most days. His features are American or European, not Japanese, and he has a harsh, severe look to him. His black hair is slicked back, and his eyes, a dark, swampy green, are fixed on Izuku, a scowl on his face. He has laugh lines and crow's feet on his face, fine lines that make him look much older than Aizawa or the police officer, and there's something about his expression or his body language that makes him look unfriendly. In front of him, on the table, is a black three-ring binder, closed, but clearly stuffed full of paper. Izuku swallows, looking to the other side of the table, to his left.

Haruta is seated in one chair, looking extremely uncomfortable. He's fidgeting, picking with the ends of his long, silver hair, and he glances up at Izuku, making eye contact with him only briefly before his eyes move back down to stare at the table. Next to him, Ren is leaning back in her chair, her long, braided hair thrown over her shoulder and resting in her lap. Her arms are folded over her chest, and she's watching Izuku with a friendly smile. She's wearing a black tank top that lets Izuku see her arms, which are marred with scars, with cigarette burns and slash marks, wounds that must have healed and scarred while she was in captivity. She looks like she's started to regain muscle, though, judging by the lack of crutches in the room and the lines of her arms.

"Hey, Ace," Ren says, tipping her head at the seat beside her. "Want to sit with me and Haruta?" Izuku blinks, then nods. He walks through the room, painfully aware of the gaze of all of the adults on him as he takes quick, quiet steps on the carpet before he settles into the seat beside Ren. She gives him a reassuring look, then turns her gaze over to Aizawa, who nods.

"We're waiting for a few more people," Aizawa says, his gaze moving to Izuku. "Nighteye, Hawks, Mirko, and Tsukauchi are on their way," he says, and Izuku blinks.

"M-Mirko is coming?" Izuku asks, his voice coming out as a little squeak. Hawks surprises him, too, but Mirko was his internship mentor, fed him pizza in her apartment and looked after him in Hosu. Izuku had thought, for some reason, that she didn't know about him being Ace, about him working with the Gekkeiju. Aizawa nods.

"She's part of the team that the Commission is assembling," Aizawa says, his eyes moving to the side, at the sharp-looking man in the suit. The man's eyes narrow into a glare.

"The Commission?" Izuku asks, feeling small as the police officer and the man who must be from the Commission look at him at the same time. The police officer looks friendly enough, giving Izuku a small smile, but the man just looks at Izuku with something that resembles disdain.

"The Commission is going to be managing this operation from here on," the man says, a thick American accent coloring his words. "UA will no longer be allowed to do whatever they please with a group of dangerous criminals." His gaze fixes on Izuku as he speaks, like Izuku is the person doing *whatever he pleases* with the Gekkeiju. Izuku swallows, afraid to look away from the man's gaze, but not wanting to maintain eye contact any longer.

Thankfully, the door to the room opens again, and Izuku turns to look to the side, to see who it is. Izuku swallows as he watches Mirko step through the doorway, raising a hand and giving Izuku a bright grin along with her wave. She's wearing a turtleneck sweater and jeans, with soft-looking grey gloves on her hands. She steps into the room, walking towards where Izuku is sitting, revealing the man standing behind her.

Izuku recognizes the number two hero, of course. Hawks is smaller than he'd thought, with a lazy grin on his face and golden-blond hair that looks like it was styled to look messy. His wings are a deep, crimson red, and they're smaller than Sasaki's, from what Izuku can see. Izuku knows that Hawks' quirk is part of the reason he can fly, but now that he's seeing the hero's wing up close, he wonders just how much the telekinesis of the feathers is necessary for flight, or if Hawks has hollow bones and a lighter frame, to help him fly.

"Nighteye should be here in just a few," Mirko says, plopping down in the chair next to Izuku and plucking her gloves off of her hands, dropping them onto the conference table one at a time. "I think Tsukauchi's with him, too," she adds. Her gaze moves over to Izuku. "Long time no see, kiddo," she says, giving Izuku a crooked grin. Izuku swallows, returning the smile with a small, shaky one of his own.

"Y-Yeah," he says, his mouth dry. "It's, um, it's good to see you," he says. Mirko nods, turning her head to look as Hawks sits down beside her, on the edge of his chair. It looks uncomfortable, the way his wings sit against the back of the chair, but Izuku supposes that Hawks must be used to it.

"This your intern?" Hawks asks, tipping his head to the side slightly and peering at Izuku with golden eyes. "He's tiny!" Hawks says, a lightheaded grin on his face. Izuku feels his cheeks starting to heat up a little as Mirko elbows Hawks in the ribs.

"Hey, he's pretty cool, you know!" Mirko laughs. "He's also apparently really good at keeping secrets," she says, her gaze lingering on Izuku perhaps a little too long. "I had no idea you were a vigilante, dude. Still not totally clear on how you pulled the whole 'lying to the truth quirk' thing," she says, shrugging, "but it's pretty impressive, no matter how you did it!" she says, smiling a toothy grin at him. Izuku feels his face growing warmer and warmer as he looks down at his lap, opening his mouth to reply. He doesn't get any words out, though, before he hears the sound of someone clearing their throat and he looks up to see the American man scowling at them.

"Midoriya is not a *vigilante*," the man says, folding his hands together in front of him and leaning forward on the table. "He is an *ex-villain* being used as an informant," he says, his words clipped and low. Izuku swallows, feeling his stomach grow cold and his heart thud in his chest.

"V-Villain?" Izuku whispers, the words coming out quieter than he'd meant them to. He shoots a gaze over to Aizawa, whose brows are drawn low on his face, his lips twitching with thinly veiled anger.

"He's not a villain," Aizawa snaps, turning to look at the man. "If you'd paid attention when you read Midoriya's file, Rivera, you would know that he's a *licensed* hero, and therefore not a villain." Aizawa's voice is tired in an angry way, like this isn't the first time he's said this to the man-- Rivera, Izuku supposes.

Rivera blows air out his nose, looking up to the ceiling. "I know perfectly well that he has a *provisional* license now, Eraserhead, but Midoriya most certainly did not when he began his nighttime activity or even when he took it upon himself to become a member of Phosgene's group." Rivera looks at Izuku, then, his green eyes narrowed and creased. "I have not been chasing Phosgene for over a decade for a high schooler to ruin that with his ego," Rivera snaps. Izuku swallows, wishing that he could inch back in the chair without it looking rude. Instead, he settles for looking down at the table and forcing himself to breathe in and out, slowly.

"You're a fucking idiot," Ren says, her voice cheerful beside Izuku. Izuku stiffens, hearing a few sharp intakes of air around him. "I mean, honestly. If you've been trying to get her for that long and you haven't, then I don't think it's Midoriya's fault that you're a failure, yeah?" Izuku glances up to see Ren shrug, his smile dark and disdainful as she stares Rivera down. Izuku hears a frustrated

hiss from Rivera, but he doesn't say anything. The girl next to him reaches up a hand, patting him on the shoulder.

"Now, now, boss," she says, shaking her head. "We should try to get along with everyone! Midoriya, Kojima, and Yamauchi have the most recent insider info on the Geckos, after all," she says, pumping a fist in the air in front of her. Rivera's gaze slides to her, irritation clear on his face.

"Koizumi," he says, a warning in his voice, "I told you not to call them that. The Gekkeiju are a very serious problem, and they pose a serious threat to--" Rivera starts, his lips dipping into a frown, but he cuts himself off when Koizumi starts to laugh, covering her mouth with her hand like she's trying to stop herself from giggling. She meets Izuku's gaze, leaning forward on the table and moving her hand to cup it around her mouth, like she's feigning a whisper.

"Don't worry," Koizumi says, smiling. "We're here to take down the Gekkeiju, that's all. We're not gonna arrest you, even if you did break the law," she says, her hazel eyes sliding over to Rivera, who frowns deeper, like he's considering arguing that point. Izuku swallows uncomfortably, not liking the way that Rivera is looking at him, but before anyone can say anything else, the door is opening.

This time, Tsukauchi peeks his head through the cracked-open door, peering around for a moment before he smiles and steps inside, opening the door wider. Behind him walks in Nighteye, clad in his usual grey suit with a scar running from the left side of his face over the cheek and down his jaw. Izuku can't help but stare, looking at the pink, freshly-healed flesh. Nighteye seems to notice, his gaze sliding over to meet Izuku's. Nighteye simply gives Izuku a nod, then follows Tsukauchi as the two of them walk around to the side of the table furthest from the door, taking seats beside each other.

"Looks like everyone is here!" Nezu says, clapping his paws together in front of him. "We should be able to go ahead and get started, then," he says, his gaze moving around the table, looking at everyone in turn. Izuku can't help but feel vaguely unsettled by this whole meeting. It feels like he should expect it to go wrong, like he should be preparing himself for bad news.

"Introductions are in order, first," Rivera says, reaching up to straighten the front of his suit. "My name is Johnathan Rivera, and I was on Phosgene's case in America before she disappeared nine years ago. This," he says, gesturing to Koizumi, "is Yua Koizumi. She's my apprentice and a detective with the Tokyo police." Koizumi, beside him, sits up straight and salutes, a wide grin on her face.

"It's a pleasure to meet all of you!" Koizumi says, her eyes flitting across the room. She drops her hand and relaxes back into her seat, folding her arms over her chest, over the police uniform she wears.

"We work for the Commission," Rivera says, his voice serious and dark in comparison to Koizumi's bright tone. "As the Gekkeiju formed and became of interest, they have been under continuous investigation by heroes and Commission employees," he says, sighing. "However, it was only very recently that we became aware this group was being led by Phosgene, or Maiko Sasaki, a wanted criminal in the United States, Canada, Mexico, the United Kingdom, and Germany," Rivera says, reaching a hand out to tap on the binder in front of him. "As such, the Commission's international relations branch will be taking over this case and will be overseeing decisions regarding it." Next to him, Koizumi raises her hand.

"Rivera handles all the villain stuff for that branch!" Koizumi adds, smiling as she sets her hand down. "So you can rest easy knowing that we'll get 'em," she says, nodding seriously. Aizawa sighs from his spot beside Nezu.

“This is all fine and good,” Aizawa says, his eyes narrowing. “But I was under the impression that we were here to decide how to stop the Gekkeiju from kidnapping another one of my students,” he says, his voice low and dry. Izuku swallows, moving his eyes back to watch how Rivera reacts, but it’s Nighteye who speaks next, his golden eyes on Izuku.

“I would also like to discuss withdrawing our current agents from their positions,” Nighteye says, his eyes narrowed. “Considering that both of them are children and have been tortured by the villains more than once.” Nighteye pushes up his glasses, and Izuku swallows, turning to look at Haruta, to see his reaction. Haruta looks like a deer in the headlights, his blue eyes huge and his teeth digging into his lower lip. His gaze is fixed on Nezu, though, not on Nighteye.

“On the contrary,” Nezu says, his eyes moving to Izuku as his ever-present smile widens. “I believe that it would be more dangerous to the two of them to remove them from the Gekkeiju entirely.” Nezu’s eyes move to Haruta. “Isn’t that right, Haruta?” Izuku turns to see Haruta wrapping his arms around himself, holding his chest like he’s hugging himself. He looks down at the table, shaking his head.

“I don’t--they keep me away from--away from Sasaki, so I--I didn’t know that--that she--” Haruta cuts himself off, squeezing his eyes shut. He draws in a slow, ragged breath before he looks back up, his dark blue eyes pointed at Rivera. “Please, you have to--you have to believe me. I didn’t *know*,” he pleads, staring at Rivera. Izuku looks at Rivera, watching as the man’s brows drop in what looks like anger or irritation.

“I would prefer you not use your quirk on me without permission,” he snaps, and Izuku watches Haruta flinch. Izuku swallows, leaning forward.

“He can’t--he can’t turn it off,” Izuku says, his voice loud and firm. “He can’t *not* use it.” Izuku watches Rivera’s eyes turn to him, narrowed and dark. Izuku forces himself not to look away, not to back down. *Haruta has been through enough already. He doesn’t need this jerk bullying him.*

“Unfortunate,” Rivera says, his eyes still on Izuku. “Regardless,” he says, clearing his throat and looking back at the table in general, “it is important that everyone here be made aware of the nature of Phosgene and her criminal acts.” He opens the binder, shuffling through the papers for a moment before holding one up.

It’s a laminated print-out of a photo, the plastic coating shining in the lights of the room. The photo shows an intersection in a city Izuku doesn’t recognize, filled with crashed cars and bright flame, dark smoke curling away and into the bright blue sky. There’s a thin layer of snow on the ground, and one building looks completely destroyed, a black shell of a three or four story building. There are emergency vehicles all around, with ambulances full of people.

“Detroit, Michigan, eleven years ago,” Rivera says, his voice low and dark. “One year exactly since the disappearance of Maiko Sasaki and the death of her sister, Hotaru Sasaki.” Rivera sets the photo down, sliding it across the table. Izuku watches Mirko reach out and take it, picking it up as Rivera continues talking. “At approximately three in the afternoon on December thirteenth, every person within a circle of approximately thirty meters in diameter suddenly experienced extreme fatigue, headache, confusion, nausea, a sensation of heat, and the scent of green hay,” Rivera’s eyes shut for a moment. “There were over thirty car accidents. One building was undergoing routine maintenance on the gas line. The maintenance worker fled the building to try and cool off in the snow.” Rivera opens his eyes, sighs. “About twenty minutes later, the building exploded.”

“Holy shit,” Hawks breathes under his breath as Mirko passes him the photo. Izuku swallows, heavily, his eyes still glued to Rivera.

“There were thirty-two injuries and six deaths,” Rivera says, his gaze moving around the people at the table. “It was believed to be a freak accident, caused by unintentional quirk usage. In America at that time, children were not required to register their quirks until they turned thirteen, and thus, there was no immediate way of disproving this theory.” Rivera sighs, reaching into his binder and pulling out another photo.

“That is,” he says, holding the photo up, “until it happened again.” Rivera pauses, giving Izuku enough time to take in the scene. A large bus, an eighteen-wheeler, and multiple cars are in the picture, all badly mangled. It’s nighttime, with a sky full of twinkling stars and the red and blue tint of emergency lights streaking across the asphalt and dust on the ground. Izuku can’t see any signs of buildings or trees in the photo, just the accident, the road, and a harsh, dry landscape, dirt littered with spiky-looking plants tinted with darkness. Koizumi clears her throat, her face grim as she speaks.

“In January, just the next month, another incident occurred. This time, it was along a highway in New Mexico in the early morning. The drivers and passengers of the truck, the tour bus, and the three personal vehicles all experienced the same thing as the people did in Detroit.” Koizumi sighs, looking down. “This time, though, they were over an hour’s drive from help. There were sixteen deaths,” Koizumi says as Rivera pushes the paper towards Aizawa, looking up and meeting Aizawa’s gaze. Izuku swallows.

“Phosgene’s MO has always been *mass* casualty,” Rivera says, shutting his binder. “There are many more incidents like this, but they are all selected for the maximum body count and they became increasingly more and more effective at killing until Phosgene’s identification as Maiko Sasaki nine years ago,” Rivera says. “She successfully managed to evade police even after her name and past were discovered, and she completely dropped off the grid shortly after. It was believed that she had passed away somewhere remote until very recently.”

Rivera looks to Izuku and Haruta, his eyes serious. “Maiko Sasaki is not an ordinary villain. She is patient, and she is good at hiding. She must not be alerted to the fact that we are closing in on her.” He sighs, his eyes closing for a moment on his brows twitching slightly. “I understand that it is... *difficult* on the two of you to work undercover with this group, but it is absolutely not an option to withdraw you from the organization at this time,” he says, opening his eyes and clenching his jaw. “The Gekkeiju have already killed dozens in Japan, many of those even before our recognition of them as a distinct group. The death toll associated with Sasaki’s name will only continue to rise if she gets away again.” His eyes seem to burn into Izuku’s. “Do you understand?”

“I-” Izuku starts, but Ren interrupts, talking over him.

“They’re *children*,” Ren says, her voice loud and angry. “They’re children and you’re sending them to a group of sadists with quirks that let them inflict pain you’ve never even come *close* to knowing.” Izuku glances over to her to see her shaking, angry. “The Gekkeiju are *different* from what you’re describing,” she adds, her lips pressing into a thin line. “They’re not killing en masse, and their operations in Japan seem focused on obtaining certain quirks. How do you even know Sasaki is going to do what she did in America?” Ren asks, gesturing as she speaks. “You’re risking the lives and wellbeing of *literal children* on a *guess*.”

Izuku watches Ren stare down Rivera, who watches her with a flat, almost blank face. The only things that give away his anger are the twitch of his eye and the downturn at the very edges of his lips. He seems to wait for a moment, seems to collect himself, then he sighs, shutting his eyes for a moment before opening them again.

“There is no better option,” Rivera says, meeting Ren’s gaze. “Between Midoriya’s Mulligan and

Kojima's Wild Empathy, the two of them are well equipped to know if they are in mortal danger. Moreover," he says, reaching a hand up to push back his dark hair, "the two of them are already secure within the organization. If they were to, say, bring in another asset for the Gekkeiju, well," Rivera's eyes slide over to look at Nezu. "There would be no question of whose side they were on, at least not for the Gekkeiju."

Izuku blinks, swallowing. *They want us to bring in Shinsou?* Izuku feels like he might be sick, like there's bile building up in his stomach, like there's a knot in his throat. He swallows again, trying to stop the wave of despair that rushes up in him, the sense of *I can't keep doing this* and *I can't do this to Shinsou* and *I just got Ren and Mouse out* and *I can't do another rescue mission like that* . Izuku wraps his hands around each other under the table, twisting and pulling at his skin.

"No," Aizawa says, his voice low and firm. "I'm not okay with Midoriya and Haruta staying in the organization, and I'm not okay with bringing Shinsou in. None of them have formal training on infiltrations, none of them did this of their own free will without coercion, and they're all *children* ," Aizawa says, gritting his teeth. "I won't allow it. I don't care if she's a major villain or if--"

"Then you're off the case," Rivera says simply, his gaze moving to Aizawa, who jerks back as if hit. "From this point forward, you will serve only as their teacher, not a hero investigating the Gekkeiju." Rivera sighs, looking up at the ceiling. Aizawa stands up, his arms shaking and his hands pressed into the table. His jaw is clenched tight and his face is turning red, but Rivera doesn't seem bothered, even as his dark green eyes move over to look at Aizawa.

"Every time one of them," Aizawa says, pointing at Izuku and Haruta with one hand, the other closing into a fist as his hair starts to rise up off of his shoulders, his eyes glowing red, "gets hurt, that's on you." Aizawa drops the hand he'd pointed at Izuku, slamming his fist into the table. "If one of them dies, you're the one who killed them. Are you okay with that?" Aizawa asks. His voice is dangerously low, his hair twisting and drifting in the air as if floating underwater. Rivera sighs.

"I've already said I don't like people using their quirks on me without my permission," he says, his voice an irritated growl. Aizawa leans forward, his hair dropping to his shoulders as he deactivates his quirk.

"Are you okay with being responsible for them being tortured?" Aizawa asks, his eyes not moving from Rivera's face. "For them being murdered before they even graduate high school?"

Rivera huffs out a laugh, shaking his head. "You misunderstand," Rivera says, looking at Aizawa with his eyes narrowed. "Phosgene is the one responsible for whatever happens to them, not me," he says, then glancing to the side, his eyes meeting Izuku's. "And, correct me if my math is wrong," he says, tapping his fingers against his binder, "but I do think that three is less than the dozens that Phosgene will surely kill if she remains unchecked."

Izuku swallows, feeling cold dread settle into his gut. It's a kind of dread that he's only ever really felt at the Gekkeiju's tower, where he's surrounded by enemies, and it feels out of place being so strong and prominent here, on the UA campus, but he can't shake it off, not now. Izuku knows, without a doubt, that he, Haruta, and Shinsou are nothing but tools to Rivera. To him, their lives are simply a price worth paying.

content warning: nausea, references to blnt-typical violence/torture

[discord!](#) [carrd!](#)

hey did u like my new OCs so sweet and kind right? great news for izuku

hugs

Chapter Notes

ngl i didn't know how to title this chapter lol

also!!!! starting today, i will only be updating every OTHER day! in april, this is going to be on odd days. i've been super super stressed with school, and i've been having worsening health issues, and i feel like the quality of the writing is suffering because im rushing to put out a chapter by the end of the day. it's led to a number of plot issues ppl have pointed out, and i also just need more time to do school stuff

hopefully this isn't permanent! i hope to go back to daily updates when the semester ends in may

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

The tension in the room is thick. Rivera is staring at Aizawa, his face twisted with anger, and Aizawa is still standing and looking at Rivera with a mixture of shock and fury. Izuku feels his stomach twisting uncomfortably. As much as he doesn't like to hear that his life doesn't matter to Rivera, it's also objectively true. Izuku can die over and over again, and he'd be okay. Shinsou and Haruta wouldn't be.

"I-I can--I'm okay with--with doing this," Izuku says, his voice cracking and stuttering as everyone in the room turns to look at him. "But--but Shinsou and Haruta shouldn't have to," he says, swallowing. "We should--we should have the choice. We wouldn't--wouldn't do a good job at lying to--to the Gekkeiju, if we didn't want to do it." Izuku swallows as Aizawa sinks back into his chair, leaning forward and putting his head in his hands.

"They're *children*," Aizawa says, quietly. "They can't make the choice to die for the sake of others. It's too much to ask." Izuku sees Mirko and Hawks exchange a glance.

"Rivera," Mirko says, her brows drawing low on her face. "Is this really the best way to do this?" She pauses, her lips dipping into a frown. "The Commission usually has better resources than kids with PTSD and no training," she says, waving a hand in Izuku's direction. Next to her, Hawks sighs.

"I kind of get his point, though," Hawks says, although the look on his face says that he doesn't like it. "They're already in, and since the Gekkeiju recruited them rather than them trying to join on their own, they're going to be less suspicious of them in general." Hawks sighs, reaching up and running a hand through his blonde hair. "They might be kids, but they should be able to make this choice for themselves. If Midoriya wants to go," Hawks says, his eyes sliding over to Izuku, "he should be allowed to. They're going to be in danger even if they don't go, if this group is as dangerous as you say they are," he says, his eyes moving back to Rivera.

"They are," Rivera says, his voice dry. His dark green eyes move over to look at Izuku, his brows furrowing and creasing in the center. "You're correct in that you will operate better as spies if you are willing," he says, nodding slightly. "However, I cannot see any way to extract you or Kojima

without altering the Gekkeiju to our attention,” he says, tapping his fingers against the plastic of his binder.

“I could die,” Haruta says, his voice barely more than a whisper. Izuku blinks, turning to look at Haruta, where he stares down at the table. “If I--if I killed myself, it wouldn’t look suspicious, r-right?” Haruta asks, glancing up, at Rivera. Izuku sees Rivera’s frown deepen into a dark scowl, just as Aizawa gives a small shake of his head.

“You’re not dying,” Aizawa says, firmly. “That’s not an option.” Izuku watches as Haruta looks to Aizawa, then away, his gaze moving meaningfully to Rivera. Rivera stares back for a long moment.

“It is one thing to send a child on a dangerous mission,” Rivera says, speaking slowly. “It is another thing entirely to ask him to kill himself for the mission.”

“But it’s--it’s fine for me to get tortured?” Haruta asks, his voice rising in volume. “It’s okay for me--for me to be in pain?” He shakes his head, his silver hair whipping around his face. “I--this is what I *want*,” Haruta says, pressing his palms into the table.

“Isn’t there another way, though?” Hawks asks. When Izuku looks over to him, he has one hand on his chin, thoughtfully. “The Gekkeiju don’t know that we know about him, correct?” Izuku nods, hesitantly, when he realizes the question is directed at him.

“Just that--that I know,” Izuku says. He bites at his lower lip. He isn’t sure if he likes where this is going, if he trusts that Hawks is going to suggest something that will help Haruta. Hawks nods, holding up a finger and smiling slightly.

“Well then, he doesn’t need to get killed,” Hawks says, “just caught.” His eyes, gold and glinting, turn to Izuku, and Izuku has to force himself not to look away. They look like Fury’s, and maybe that’s why it takes him a moment to process what Hawks just said. By the time Izuku is putting it together, Nighteye is speaking, his eyes narrowed.

“You want to make it seem that we’ve apprehended him as the traitor,” Nighteye says. He folds his hands together in front of him. “Interesting. It could work,” he says, his gaze sliding over to Haruta, who looks almost shell-shocked.

“I-I want to die,” Haruta says, but it’s weak. “I don’t--would that even work?” he asks, shifting to look at Rivera and Koizumi. Rivera doesn’t move for a long moment, like he’s thinking, but after a few seconds pass, he sighs.

“It should,” Rivera says. “We’d need to be very careful about exactly how much information and *what* information we leak to the Gekkeiju regarding Kojima’s situation, and he would need a protection detail,” he says, his lips twisting into a scowl. “But that could work.” Izuku lets out a small, quiet breath of relief. He watches as Nighteye and Tsukauchi exchange a glance, Tsukauchi tipping his notebook up slightly to show something to Nighteye. Izuku wonders what it is, if someone had lied about something, if Rivera had been lying when he said it might work. Izuku isn’t sure it’d surprise him, if he had.

“There’s still the matter of Shinsou,” Nezu says from his spot beside Aizawa. “After all, he isn’t in the same situation as Midoriya and Kojima. There isn’t necessarily a good reason to put him in a similar bind,” Nezu says. His small smile is there, as always, and Izuku wonders if it’s just how his face looks. He doesn’t sound upset, necessarily, but he doesn’t seem happy, either.

“We need at least two agents,” Rivera says, his fingers rapping against the plastic of the binder.

“It’s protocol for situations like these.”

“Again, wouldn’t it make sense to send in an *actual* agent and not a student?” Mirko asks, folding her arms over her chest. Izuku watches her narrow her eyes at Rivera, giving him a dirty look.

“It would if the Gekkeiju would accept new members that they hadn’t already scouted,” Rivera says, sighing. “Koizumi, if you would,” he says, gesturing to her. Koizumi nods quickly, her hair swishing with the movement.

“The Gekkeiju is largely composed of members who act to bring in money,” she says. “This is the part of the Gekkeiju that operates mostly within Tokyo and surrounding cities, and it’s the part of the organization that we’ve been aware of for a while.” Koizumi looks over to Nighteye. “Nighteye and Eraserhead were brought onto the case when Gekkeiju members dealing in drug trade and human trafficking were noted to frequently travel into Musutafu,” she says. “They identified Leadfoot as one of the higher-ranking operatives and determined from information obtained from lower-ranking members that Fury was in charge of at least the attempts to make money for the organization.” She pauses, looking at Rivera for a moment before she continues speaking.

“The Gekkeiju actively recruits for their lower circle, which is not well centralized, and they’ll accept people who invite themselves in, so to speak, but they aren’t like that for their higher ranks,” Koizumi says, gesturing to Izuku and Haruta. “They seem to hand-pick and abduct people that the lieutenants and Phosgene deal with directly. That’s how they ended up keeping their top dog secret for so long, even with Phosgene’s reputation and... conspicuous looks.”

“In other words,” Rivera says, a weary look on his face, “sending in a professional agent wouldn’t do any good if the Gekkeiju weren’t already interested in them.” Rivera grimaces, the wrinkles by his mouth deepening. “Obviously, it would be preferable to send in a trained adult, but that’s simply not possible.”

“Sending in another student isn’t an option,” Aizawa says, his voice low and irritated. “Even if the organization is difficult to infiltrate, it doesn’t justify involving Shinsou.”

“You’re not on the case,” Rivera says, simply. His eyes are narrowed slightly as he looks at Aizawa. “But, because you are his teacher, you should know that he’s in danger either way. The Gekkeiju will be attempting to abduct him, and unless you are able to contain him on campus with a guard duty every moment of every day, they may well succeed.” Rivera’s eyes move to Izuku and Haruta. “I’m sure these two will be able to tell you just how good the Gekkeiju are at taking children. Midoriya was with UA, at an undisclosed location, and he was still taken. Can you guarantee Shinsou’s safety, if you do not have him join?” Rivera leans forward, folding his arms together on top of his binder. “Will he be afforded the same freedoms Midoriya and Kojima have, if he is taken? Or will he be treated like Yamauchi and the Mouse girl, kept locked away all day and all night?” Rivera shakes his head, pressing his lips together. It looks like he’s in pain.

“Shinsou should--he should be the one to decide,” Izuku says, quietly. “He can’t--he can’t have something this important decided for him. It wouldn’t be right,” Izuku says. “If I--If I’d been given that choice, I might have--I might have said yes, if it meant that--that I could work under Manami from the start, instead of spending so much time reporting to Fury.” Izuku swallows, his eyes moving over to Haruta. “And I was--I was only reporting to Fury unofficially. It would--it would have been worse, if he’d been my real boss, too,” Izuku says, swallowing. Haruta meets his gaze.

“It would have been,” Haruta breathes quietly, an agreement that sends a shiver through Izuku’s body. Izuku knows that Haruta has been through more than him, has been through worse, but he doesn’t know the whole of it, doesn’t know what, exactly, Haruta has been through.

“I can accept that,” Rivera says, and when Izuku looks at him, his brow is furrowed slightly, but his face is still smoothed out from how it was before. “We will give Shinsou the choice, then.” His gaze is trained on Izuku, something unreadable in his eyes.

“It’s not much of a choice, is it,” Ren murmurs from beside Izuku. Izuku swallows, looking up to see her gaze turned down at the table, her lips twisted into a frown. “What point is there in having heroes if we can’t keep one teenager safe?” she says, looking up, at the Commission workers and the pros sitting across from her. “What kind of world are we living in, that things like this keep happening? You’re going to ask a sixteen year old if he’d rather live in fear of being captured or work as a *spy* .” Ren stands up, suddenly, slamming her palms down on the table. “This is so--this is so wrong!” she says, her eyes wide.

“It is,” Rivera says, his face calm and impassive, like this doesn’t even phase him. “Understand this, Avenging Angel,” he says, his eyes staring at her unblinkingly. “This is not the fault of UA, or the fault of the heroes in the room.” His eyes shift, looking at Izuku and Haruta. “This is not the fault of the students who have been taken by the Gekkeiju.”

Rivera stands up, picking his binder up with one hand and tucking it under his arm, his gaze meeting Izuku’s, dark green eyes narrowing with something that looks strangely like sorrow. Izuku feels unsettled as Rivera pushes his chair in with one hand, Koizumi scrambling up beside him.

“What has happened, what is still happening, and what will happen is the fault of the Gekkeiju, of Maiko Sasaki and her soldiers,” Rivera says. He turns to walk out of the room, but as he sets his hand on the handle of the door, he turns his head back to look at Izuku.

“The fact that you are in this situation at all?” Rivera says, his lips twitching up into a bitter smile. “That is my fault, and my fault alone.”

Izuku watches as Rivera steps out into the hallway, Koizumi following close behind. He feels like he’s missing something.

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It doesn’t really hit Izuku until much later, when he’s sitting at his desk and working through a worksheet from math, when he marks down an answer on the paper and his thoughts form together, and he thinks *Shinsou is going to get hurt because of me* , and he feels like he’s been punched in the gut. He drops his pencil onto the paper on his desk, making a clattering noise in the quiet of the room.

Izuku knows, logically, as he runs his hands through his hair and tugs at the roots, that it isn’t because of him that Shinsou is in this position, that he’s going to be in the hands of the Gekkeiju or living his life constrained because of them. Izuku knows that the Gekkeiju would have eventually done this either way, would have used Haruta’s closeness to Shinsou, his ability to read minds, his skill at getting information, and they would have taken Shinsou even if Izuku hadn’t joined them. Izuku knows that nothing he could have done would have prevented this, short of killing Sasaki with his own two hands.

It doesn’t really matter though, not with the frustration and fear Izuku feels swelling in his throat, choking his breathing and making him want to cry. He pushes his chair back, listens to it scrape against the wooden floor before he leans forward, pressing his forehead into the cool surface of his desk. Izuku stares down, at the ground and at his socked feet where they’re crossed at the ankles, and he breathes.

Izuku wants to hurt himself. He wants to dig a knife somewhere it shouldn’t be, wants to cut out his

ribs and his lungs and his heart. He wants to do something drastic, something that hurts and burns and would give this burning feeling that's in his chest somewhere to *go* , would give this terrible energy something to *do* . Izuku hates the way that his eyes are burning, that his breathing is growing short and shaky. He wants to cry, but not like this. He wants to cry in a way that makes him feel *better* , like he's releasing something, like his chest is damp and full but clean. Not like this--not where it feels like something is stuck in his throat, like he could tear his hair out and scratch wounds into the flesh of his forearms and it wouldn't be enough. Not like this.

Izuku squeezes his eyes shut, just to make the tears gathering along his eyelashes drop to the ground, just to make himself feel like this is real, like he might actually feel better when this is done. His room is quiet except for the sounds of his wet, uneven breathing and the sound of the heater, whirring softly in his ceiling. Izuku contemplates, briefly, jumping headfirst from the balcony, even though two stories likely wouldn't kill him, before he pushes that out of his mind.

Izuku lurches upright suddenly, like he wasn't planning it, like he didn't even know he was going to until he did. He reaches one hand up to press it to the damp surface of his cheek, to feel the salty tears and slick snot that's started to run down his face, and he stumbles across his room, to his closet. He opens the door and stares at his box, the one he knows holds a noose and knives and razors and the sleeping medication that Recovery Girl had refilled for him, after the morgue. He'd told her he'd finished the first bottle, but the truth was, he'd only used it once, so long ago, to kill himself. Izuku thinks about that, thinks about betraying the trust that Neito has put in him, thinks about dying slowly, high.

The thought reminds him of Manami, of the cuts on her legs and the little blue pill she'd taken. It reminds him of the medical supplies and the way she'd used her own quirk on herself. *We're alike* , Izuku thinks, a hysterical giggle tearing its way out of his chest. *We both hurt ourselves and use our quirks on ourselves* .

It's been so long, he thinks, then. Izuku hasn't killed himself in too long. He could, tonight. He could kill himself and he'd feel better, he'd feel that soft relaxation and euphoria he'd dreamed of, if only for a second. Maybe his chest wouldn't feel like a gaping wound, then. Maybe he'd feel okay, if only for a moment.

Izuku shuts the door to his closet. He takes a step back, away from it. He doesn't know why he moves to the door of his room, doesn't know why he fumbles with the lock until he can open the door, doesn't know why he even stopped himself in the first place. Izuku thinks that, in the same way he misses the days where he'd been killing himself over and over just because he wanted to, he's also afraid to go back to that. He's afraid to be bleeding out and cutting himself and making himself feel better, like that, when he *should* be strong, should be able to handle this. He's hurt the people close to him enough, with what he's doing to Shinsou. He doesn't need to worry Neito, too.

Izuku isn't expecting to open the door to come face to face with his teacher, his dark curls pulled back into a low ponytail and an exhausted look on his face. Izuku and Aizawa both blink, jerking back slightly in surprise, before Aizawa seems to notice the tears on Izuku's face, the uneven breathing of his student. His brows furrow, his eyes narrowing slightly.

"Midoriya?" Aizawa asks. "Are you okay?" Izuku swallows, pauses, and then shakes his head, because he isn't okay. Izuku swallows again, trying to force back his sobs, and he looks up at his teacher.

"Can I--can I hug you?" he asks, his voice wobbling pathetically. Aizawa nods, quickly, an expression of pain on his face, and he steps forward, opening his arms. Izuku moves in, wrapping his arms around his teacher's chest, pressing his face into his shirt. Aizawa wraps his arms around

Izuku, gripping him tight.

“I wanted to come make sure you were okay, after what Rivera said,” Aizawa murmurs, his voice quiet. “I’m glad I did,” he says, rubbing soothing circles into Izuku’s spine with one of his hands. Izuku just breathes in the warm air coming off of his teacher’s skin, focuses on the grounding pressure of the arms around him.

“I’m--I’m okay,” Izuku says. “I just--I don’t want Shinsou to get hurt, too,” he says, his voice cracking as he says Shinsou’s name. Aizawa’s arms tighten around him.

“I know,” Aizawa says. “The adults are meeting tomorrow to come up with a plan of how to tell him and when. It’s during afternoon classes, so you won’t be able to be there, but I’ll keep you updated.” He sighs. “I might not be on the case officially, but Rivera seems to plan on including me in meetings.” His voice sounds tight, like he’s angry. Izuku feels, suddenly, something dark and anxious rear up in his chest.

“Do you--are you mad at me?” Izuku blurts out, his words quick and small. “I-I did so many--I’ve done so much stuff that--that you told me not to, and I keep--I keep making things hard for you,” Izuku says, the words spilling out. Aizawa’s grip tightens on him, pulling him closer.

“I’m not mad at you, Midoriya,” Aizawa says, his voice gentle. “This isn’t your fault.”

“Some of it is,” Izuku says, swallowing. “I could have--I could have told you about stuff, sooner.” Aizawa sighs, his chest rising and falling heavily with the motion.

“You could have,” Aizawa agrees, “but it’s still not your fault, Midoriya, and I’m still not mad at you.” He pulls back, slightly, looking at Izuku’s face, his eyes moving as if he’s searching for something. “You’re not in trouble. All I want is for you and the rest of my students to be safe and happy,” he says, voice firm. “If I ever seem mad, it’s only because I’m worried about you and I don’t want you or anyone else doing things that could hurt you. Understand?”

Izuku nods, feeling the tears running down his face, hot and wet. “I-I understand,” he says, and when his voice cracks at the end with a sob, it’s a different kind of sob. He throws himself back at his teacher, crying, but it doesn’t feel like the frustrated, painful crying from before. Izuku feels like a knot is slowly untying in his chest, growing looser and calmer with every soft shushing sound Aizawa makes and every circle he rubs into Izuku’s back.

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Izuku is walking back to the dorm after class, yawning into the palm of his hand and squinting against the afternoon sun, when he sees Maka and Ema. It feels like it’s been a thousand years since he’s seen either of them, since he’s had training. It’s been since Aizawa figured out that he was Ace, he supposes. They’re both in their school uniforms, but Ema has a thick, navy-blue sweater on over hers, the sleeves dangling down so that only the tips of her fingers show. When Izuku meets her gaze, she waves, gesturing at him to come over to them where they’re walking across the grassy lawn. Izuku blinks, then turns, headed in their direction.

The wind is cold and biting against the bare skin of his cheeks, and he hopes, briefly, that whatever the two upperclassmen want from him, they’ll make it quick or move inside. Izuku’s uniform alone isn’t quite warm enough to spend too much time outside in the November chill, even in the afternoon, when it’s the warmest it gets all day. Izuku walks quickly, trying to get some warmth into his limbs as he crosses the lawn to get to the second years where they’re framed by the orange-gold light of late afternoon.

“Hey,” he says, breathlessly. “What do you--what do you need?” he asks, tipping his head to the side and trying to look friendly rather than a little nervous. He thinks it works, because Ema smiles at him. Maka just stares at him with narrowed crimson eyes, her arms folded over her chest.

“We need to talk,” she says, looking Izuku up and down. “Do you have time right now?” Her voice is curt, low. Izuku wonders if she’s angry, or if he’d just forgotten how she normally talks. It could really be either, all things considered.

“Um, s-sure,” Izuku says, reaching up and rubbing one of his arms with the other, trying to massage some warmth into it. “Can we--can we go inside somewhere, though? It’s k-kind of cold,” he says, smiling awkwardly. Ema nods.

“Yeah, we can use the 2-A classroom!” she says, smiling and jerking her thumb back to point at the building a few yards behind her. “It’ll be empty right now, since classes are over.” Izuku hesitates, before nodding.

“That works,” he says, and as soon as the words leave his lips, Maka is turning on her heels and stomping off, towards the building. Ema flashes him an apologetic grin.

“We’d better follow!” Ema says brightly, turning and walking after Maka. Izuku hurries to keep pace with them, the grass compressing under his feet like carpet. The shadow of the building soon blocks the sunlight, and the shade of it is colder than it had been in the sun. Izuku feels a shiver creep up his arms and run down his spine.

“Is everything--is everything okay?” Izuku asks as Maka opens the door to the building, stepping inside. Ema grabs the door before it can close, holding it open so that Izuku can walk inside, too. Izuku does, turning back to see Ema stepping inside and letting the door fall shut behind her.

“Um, well, it’s probably better to just wait until we’re in the classroom,” Ema says, looking almost nervous. She reaches up to run a hand through her hair, a motion that Izuku’s seen over and over again with Haruta. Izuku feels a prickle in his gut, and he swallows, starting to walk again as Maka continues down the hallway.

“R-Right,” Izuku says, wrapping his arms around his chest. It’s warm in the building, but there are still goosebumps prickling along his skin. Izuku knows where the 2-A classroom is, and he stops a few paces back, watching as Maka opens the door. She walks inside, not looking back at Izuku. Izuku is just ahead of Ema, and he steps into the room, swallowing nervously.

The room is identical to the 1-A classroom, although one of the seats near the door is almost comically large, and there’s a hole in the chair. Izuku wonders what kind of quirk the student who sits there has, but he quickly refocuses his thoughts on Maka and Ema as Maka takes a seat on the top of a desk near the center of the front row. She sets her feet in the chair, resting her elbows on her knees and leaning forward, piercing Izuku with her dark red gaze. Ema walks over, sitting down in the chair of a desk diagonal from Maka, in the second row. Izuku swallows, moving to sit in the desk beside the two. He feels nervous, like he’s too close to the two of them, and it’s stupid. *Neither of them have ever hurt me*, he reminds himself.

“Midoriya,” Ema starts, biting at her bottom lip. “Do you know who’s hurting Haruta?”

She asks it so plainly, so simply that it takes Izuku a moment to figure out what she’d said, exactly. He stares at her for a moment, at her wide, neon pink eyes, before he glances over to Maka, whose eyes are narrowed in what he recognizes now as suspicion, not anger. Izuku swallows.

“I-I do,” he says, quietly. “But I--I can’t tell you who it is,” he says, looking between the two of

them so he doesn't have to see their expressions, their reactions.

"Why not?" Maka asks, her voice sharp. Izuku shuts his eyes for a moment. He can smell her quirk, knows it's part of why his heart feels like it's rising in his chest, but it doesn't make the feeling go away just to know why it's there.

"It's--it's confidential," Izuku says. He doesn't open his eyes, doesn't look up at them. He hears a frustrated exhale, almost a growl, that he knows must come from Maka, but it's Ema who speaks next.

"Confidential?" she asks, her voice soft and quiet and confused. "You two have been... you've been going out on the weekends, together. To wherever it is he's been getting hurt." Izuku blinks, looking up at her. It occurs to him that she must have known for ages that Haruta left on weekends, that he was getting hurt. She must have seen the signs.

"Yeah, I--" Izuku cuts himself off, shakes his head. "How long have you--how long have you known? Why didn't you tell anyone?" he asks. He watches Ema's brows furrow, watches tears start to build in her eyes.

"He hasn't--he hasn't told me anything," Ema says, reaching up to wrap her arms around herself, her fingers tangling in the fabric of her sweater. "I just--I know someone's hurting him, but I--I can't prove it," she says, her eyes glistening. "I told Nezu, and he--he didn't *do* anything," she says, shaking her head the tiniest bit. "I wanted to tell Aizawa-sensei, but Haruta wouldn't let me." She sniffles, and Maka starts speaking, her voice quick and harsh.

"You haven't done shit about it either, have you?" she asks, her lip curling up slightly. "You know who it is, and you haven't--" she starts, but Izuku interrupts her.

"Aizawa-sensei knows," Izuku says, biting at his lower lip. "I--I told him, and we--we're trying to get him out," Izuku says, his breath speeding up along with his heart rate. He feels a desperate, primal kind of fear, like he's pinned down underneath a lion's open maw, wash over him. "I-I didn't--I can't--" he shakes his head, reaching up a hand to press against his mouth. He feels dizzy, sick to his stomach all of a sudden, and he stands up from the chair, his legs shaking as he does.

"Maka," Ema says, quietly. "Your quirk," she whispers, and it makes sense, why Izuku feels like he's about to collapse, like something is terribly, terribly wrong. He looks up, watches Maka throw herself off of the desk, marching over to the window and ripping it open with a growl of frustration.

"Fuck!" she says, her hands pressing into the windowsill. "I'm not trying to--I'm not fucking trying to *dose* you," she says, looking back over her shoulder. "Haruta's hurting," she says, her teeth digging into her bottom lip enough to draw blood. "And you're around him all of the time, all the sudden, at the same time that training stops. It's--why are we being kept out of the loop?" she asks, shaking her head, dark curls moving. "He's *important* to us."

"I--" Izuku starts, taking in a breath. The thick, oppressive sense of fear is still permeating him, but he's able to push it away, able to relax just slightly with the distance between him and Maka. "I should have told you," he says, swallowing. "I would tell you--I would, but I can't," he says, biting at his lower lip. "It would--it would put him in more danger," Izuku says, squeezing his hands into fists.

"They're hurting you too," Ema says, her brows drawing together. "Aren't they?" Izuku watches Maka's head swivel around to look at him, her eyes widening slightly. Izuku doesn't respond, doesn't say anything, but something on his face must give him away, because Maka's shoulders

drop, her body sagging slightly.

“Fuck,” she says, quietly, and Izuku has to agree with the sentiment. He swallows, feeling unsteady and unsettled. Ema pushes herself out of the desk, moving forward, towards Izuku.

“I’m giving you a hug,” she says, emotion blazing in her bright eyes. “Midoriya, I--I’m so *sorry*,” she says, pulling him forward and wrapping her arms over his shoulders, around his neck. She’s warm, and Izuku tentatively raises his hands to hug her back.

“It’s--it’s okay,” Izuku says quietly.

“No, no it isn’t,” Ema says. “I wish you could tell me what was happening, but I wish even more that it wasn’t happening in the first place,” she says, and it hits Izuku like a punch to the gut. Izuku shuts his eyes, just breathing in and out. He wishes, too, that he wasn’t being hurt, that Haruta wasn’t being hurt. It feels like he’s been hoping for things to turn out okay, but he hadn’t even thought of a world where this didn’t happen at all. It feels so distant, so impossible. Izuku supposes that it is, now.

“I’d hug you too, but I’m kind of bad at it,” Maka remarks from the back of the room. Izuku can’t help the little wet laugh that escapes him, bubbling out of his throat.

“Sorry for the interrogation,” Ema says, pulling away from him. “We were just... we were worried,” she says, a sheepish smile on her lips. Maka nods from the back of the room, her gaze on the ground where she leans against the window.

“It’s okay,” Izuku says, his throat feeling damp in the way that it does after crying. “I-I would be, too.”

“Yeah, well, we were assholes about it,” Maka says. “Or I was, at least. It’s hard to tell, but we’re on your side, or whatever.” She doesn’t look at him, but her face colors slightly, and Izuku feels something uncoil in his chest.

Chapter End Notes

content warnings: uhhhhh talk of nausea and self harm and suicide

[discord!](#) [carrd!](#)

pog thank you for reading yall are the frogs to my swamp aka the lights of my life

festival

Chapter Summary

last time: the talk with rivera finishes up, izuku gets a hug from aizawa, and izuku gets a hug from ema

Chapter Notes

two days is so long.... but it was so nice and relaxing to not have to stress about writing quickly!!!! plus this chapter was hard to write for some reason--i think im bad at writing fluff lol

also, comments are moderated now. im not going to publish comments that are rude or describe real trauma in detail. im also not going to acknowledge these comments any more. i don't want the negativity in this space!!! this is what i do for fun and i want it to stay happy and fun :D

i will still publish criticism if it's not rude/is constructive!!! i like hearing y'all's feedback, even if sometimes it's that im making mistakes. i only ask that you please word them kindly :D

okay enough of that--chappie time!!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Getting ready for a mission feels strange, knowing that Shinsou is in danger, that the Commission is in charge, now. Izuku feels wrong, feels unnerved as he unlocks his door, his room and the hallway both dark and quiet. He's not in his costume, yet--it would be bad if someone saw him sneaking out in it, after all. Rather than being hidden in his hollow tree, it's now in a room in the building closest to the gate out of UA, tucked away in a case underneath a chair. Aizawa had picked the spot, and Izuku can't help but wonder if Aizawa is still going to be able to help Izuku with things like that, now that he's been taken off the case. Izuku swallows as he pulls his door shut behind him, the door clicking softly.

The hallway is silent, like it often is at night, and the shadows stretch long and dark across the floor. It still smells like curry and spices and fried chicken, from the curry katsu that Kacchan had cooked for dinner, the savory smell twisting up into Izuku's nose, reminding him of the sharp contrast between him and his friends. As much as he still eats with them, still goes to class with them and studies with them, he's not the same. Izuku's sure his friends all have their own secrets, but he's also sure that they're nothing like Izuku's.

Izuku starts down the stairs, the wood making soft sounds under his boots. It's chilly enough outside that he'd put on a coat just to go from the dorm building to the one with his costume, but it's warm in the building, and Izuku feels a few small beads of sweat form on his upper lip as he takes the stairs down to the first floor. Izuku wants to push up the sleeves of his jacket, but he knows he'll be cold in a moment. *Better to get every bit of warmth I can, now*, he thinks as he

steps into the common room. It's illuminated by the light of a television on but silent, flickering through footage of a training session from earlier in the year. Izuku squints at it, wondering why it's still on, before he hears a voice.

"Midoriya?" Shinsou asks, popping up from one of the couches in front of the television. "What are you doing?" he asks, reaching a hand up to rub at one of his eyes. His violet hair is even more disheveled than usual, and he's wearing sweats and a long sleeved shirt. The bags under his eyes look like bruises in the harsh light from the TV, the shadows on his face making him look almost like a ghost. Izuku blinks, almost forgetting to reply.

"I-I, um, I have permission!" Izuku says, before he can think better of it. He watches Shinsou's eyes narrow for a moment before the boy flops back onto the couch, disappearing from Izuku's line of sight, blocked by the sofa's back. Izuku can still hear Shinsou's weary sigh, though.

"None of my business," Shinsou mutters. Izuku pauses. He remembers Shinsou's frustration with him and Haruta, with them not telling him things. He remembers the fact that, soon, Shinsou might be in the same situation as Izuku, might be sneaking out at night to get information for a group of villains. Izuku swallows.

"I-I can't tell you," Izuku says. "But I might be able to, s-soon," he says. There's a rustling, and Shinsou sits up, his brow slightly furrowed.

"What does that mean?" he asks, one brow raising and his mouth twisting into a confused scowl. He looks so exhausted that Izuku almost tells him. Instead, Izuku swallows, feeling his throat move.

"It's--it's a mission," Izuku says. "Kind of like a--like a work-study," he says. He bites at his bottom lip. "So I'm not allowed to--to tell you, but when it's over, I-I should be allowed to," he explains. It's not exactly true, and Izuku will be telling Shinsou *far* before things are actually over, but it's probably enough to convince Shinsou that Izuku isn't hiding things from him, not out of malice, anyway. It seems to work, because Shinsou sighs, his eyes moving up to stare at the ceiling for a moment before he flops back down onto the couch.

"Be safe, Midoriya," he says. "I know it's hard for you," he says, a snarky tone to his voice. Izuku smiles, but he can't help the way his heart constricts in his chest as he turns to leave, to walk out of the dorm into the cold night air.

Be safe, Shinsou had said. *Be safe*, like Izuku wasn't putting him in danger, like Izuku wasn't keeping secrets from him. Izuku twists the doorknob, opening the door to a rush of cold air that snakes its way inside, seeking the warmth of the dorm. Izuku swallows.

"Bye, Shinsou," he says, and he steps outside, before Shinsou can reply.

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"Shouldn't we--shouldn't we be doing something else?" Izuku asks, squirming uncomfortably on Aizawa's couch in the teacher's dorm room. "I mean, there's--there's the situation with the Gekkeiju," Izuku says, twisting his mouth into a frown. Aizawa simply sighs from where he's packing a backpack, setting bottles of water and a first aid kit inside it.

"We still have to keep up the appearance that nothing is going on," Aizawa says, zipping the backpack shut. "You need a break, too. You should try and enjoy this." He moves over to Izuku, dropping the backpack in his lap. "There's water, snacks, money, and first aid stuff. If either of the girls start having issues with their quirks or wants to leave, you can call me or your mom. If neither

of us answer, Hizashi should have his phone on as well.” Aizawa pauses, then reaches into his pocket, taking out his phone. “I’ll share his contact info with you,” he says, typing on his phone screen. Izuku watches him, still feeling on edge.

“I just--I don’t think I’m going to be able to relax,” Izuku admits, wringing his hands together on his lap. “The girls are going to be able to tell that I’m nervous,” he says. Aizawa glances up at him, sliding his phone back into his pocket.

“You’ll do fine,” Aizawa says. “Those two have been through a lot worse than a nervous babysitter.” The edge of his lip twitches up, ever so slightly. “Mouse already loves you. Eri will, too.”

Izuku swallows, then nods, hesitantly. “Okay,” he says, although he won’t believe Aizawa until he sees it for himself. He doesn’t want to mess this up, but at the same time, he doesn’t want to do it at all. He’d rather help with the Shinsou situation, with getting Haruta out and to safety, with coming up with plans. Izuku feels like the festival is a luxury that should only be afforded to people who *aren’t* working for villains. It feels far too nice for someone like him.

Izuku is startled out of his thoughts by a knock on the door, loud and clear in the room. He jumps a little in his seat, earning him a sidelong glance from Aizawa as the man walks to the door and opens it, his hand twisting the doorknob. Izuku sees Eri and Mouse first, standing in front of his mom and holding hands. Eri’s long, silver hair is up in a ponytail, and she’s wearing a small grey dress with long sleeves and a fabric that looks thick enough to keep her warm, with long, woolen sock underneath. Mouse is wearing jeans and an oversized sweatshirt that covers up whatever she might have on underneath, and there’s a bright green beanie covering most of her curls. When she reaches up with her free hand to wave at Izuku, he can see temporary tattoos all over her hands and wrist.

“Izuku!” Mouse says, and she’s running forward, tugging Eri with her. Mouse runs at Izuku, practically jumping into his lap to wrap her arms around him. Startled, Izuku sets a hand on her head, patting her hair through the beanie. Izuku knows that Mouse is fond of him, but this level of emotion, of physical contact, is more than she’d shown before. Izuku glances up at his mom, a question on his face, and she smiles, softly.

“Mouse has really missed you,” Inko says, a hint of warm laughter in her voice. “She’s been talking about this all week.” Izuku blinks, glancing down at Mouse, who pulls back a little, only to headbutt Izuku gently in the shoulder.

“Mouse was real good this week,” she says, a low whisper. “Mouse did *all* of the therapy and *all* of the school stuff.” Her tone is almost conspiratorial, like she’s telling Izuku a secret, and she nods as she speaks. She isn’t smiling, but there’s a gleam in her eyes that’s the next best thing. Izuku glances to the side, at Eri, who’s standing next to the couch looking awkward. Her brows are furrowed over her dark red eyes, and she looks at the floor rather than Izuku.

“That’s awesome, Mousey,” Izuku says, giving her another pat. “Hi, Eri,” he says to the other girl. “I’m Izuku.”

“You saved Mouse,” Eri says, tipping her head to the side just slightly. “Right?” Izuku nods.

“I did,” he confirms, and he can’t help the swell of pride that rises in his chest. Mouse was safe now, because of him. She was in therapy and learning things she’d miss out on and not in *pain*, not being *used*. It makes Izuku’s guilt and anger and fear feel small in comparison to the warmth that fills his chest.

“Mirio saved me,” Eri says, looking down at her hands as she folds them together, fiddling with her fingers in a way that Izuku does a lot himself. “Aizawa said that he was gonna try to be here, too,” Eri says, nodding slightly. She looks a mixture of excited and scared, and Izuku isn’t sure how to handle it. Aizawa seems to notice, taking a few steps towards her and crouching down slightly.

“Mirio is going to come when Izuku is done watching you two,” he says, looking Eri in the eye. “After the festival, he’s going to look after you while I have my patrol.” He glances up, at Izuku. “The festival runs until eight. You’ll hand them off to Mirio here.” Izuku nods, giving Mouse another pat on the head.

“Should we--should we get going, then?” he asks, looking at Mouse and then Eri. Eri nods, the movement small, and Mouse perks up, removing herself from Izuku and hopping to her feet. Izuku stands up from the couch, reaching down to smooth out his jeans.

“Call me if you need anything,” Aizawa says. Izuku doesn’t point out that he’s already said that. Instead, he smiles.

“I will,” he says, and then he looks down at Eri and Mouse, offering them his hands. Mouse reaches up and takes his hand without hesitation, her palm warm. Eri hesitates, but after a moment, she reaches up and takes his other hand.

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Izuku isn’t sure what he expected from the festival, but this certainly wasn’t it. He thinks he’d been imagining middle school events, with poorly made decorations and his bullies running around, using their quirks as much as they wanted until a teacher halfheartedly tells them to stop.

Instead, the festival is *huge*, with booths that are crafted up with concrete and wood and colorful paper decorations. There’s a number of signs, painted in blue and white--the school’s colors--and they have the names of the various classes on them. Izuku had forgotten that there were this many people at UA, to be honest, and he feels more than a little overwhelmed at the number of people mulling about the festival. He can tell that Mouse and Eri are feeling the same way from the way that Eri grips his hand tighter and Mouse leans into him, pressing her little body against the outside of his leg.

“Loud,” Mouse says, reaching up and tugging on the hem of Izuku’s shirt with her free hand. Izuku glances down at her, giving her a small smile.

“It’s okay,” he says, looking around for a spot that’s a little less crowded. “Let’s go somewhere a little quieter, okay?” He spots a patch of grass underneath a tree, a little out of the way. There doesn’t seem to be as many people there, and it’s away from the main booths, some of which seem to have started playing music or testing out sound systems. Izuku’s feeling a little overwhelmed himself, and he’s been around crowds before--he can’t imagine what it must be like for Mouse and Eri. Izuku leads them through the people, towards the empty spot beside the tree.

“This should be--should be better,” he says as they reach their destination. Mouse is still clinging to his leg, but she doesn’t seem quiet as scared, anymore. It’s harder to tell with Eri since Izuku doesn’t know her as well, but she’s looking around, watching the people move among the booths. Most of the crowd is wearing UA uniforms, probably because class only let out a few hours ago, but Izuku can see a couple of people in costumes or in casual clothing like he’s wearing. He thinks he might spot Neito, but the crowd is too dense and he’s too far away to be sure.

“Um,” Eri says, her voice so soft Izuku almost misses it. He glances down at her.

“What’s up?” he asks, tipping his head to the side. Eri fidgets a little picking at her lower lip with her teeth.

“Can I--do you think I would be able to, um, to get a candy apple?” she asks, shifting back and forth where she stands. “Mirio told me about them, and I-I hoped they’d be here.” Her gaze is locked on the ground, her face shadowed with a tiny little frown, like she already knows that Izuku’s going to say no. Izuku swallows, pushing down the fierce protective urge that rises in his chest.

“We can try and find you one,” Izuku says, trying to keep his voice gentle and soft. It seems to work, because Eri looks up at him with huge, shining red eyes.

“Really?” she whispers, and when Izuku nods, her face splits into a smile. Izuku can’t help but grin back. He glances over to Mouse, who’s looking at them with wonder.

“Do you want a candy apple too, Mouse? Or is there something else that you want?” Izuku watches Mouse’s brown eyes meet his. She tips her head to the side slightly, squinting a little, like she’s thinking.

“...Meat,” Mouse says, with a certain finality to it. “Mouse likes meat the best.” Izuku nods.

“We’ll get Eri and candy apple and Mouse meat, then,” he says, giving them a smile. “Are you two okay to walk around, or is it still too loud?”

“I’m okay,” Eri says, her head bobbing in a tiny nod. Mouse blinks, then leans against Izuku.

“If Izuku carries me,” Mouse announces. “Mouse will be okay.” There’s a certain hesitance in her voice, a certain way she clings to him that makes Izuku think she’s afraid she’ll be punished for asking, that she’ll get in trouble. Izuku hates that, but at the same time, he’s proud that she’d said what she wanted in the first place.

“I’ll carry you,” he says, and Mouse lights up. Izuku gives her a big smile as he leans down and picks her up, letting her scramble onto his back, and he thinks, just for a second as she’s wrapping her arms over his neck to hold herself on, that he hears a tiny giggle from her.

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Mouse is fast asleep on Izuku’s back by the time they get back to the dorms, her mouth smeared with sticky barbeque sauce and her breaths hot and damp on Izuku’s shoulder. He’d been a little worried about her falling, at first, but Izuku’s got a good enough grip on her legs that he thinks she’d stay on, even if her grip around his neck loosened. Eri’s holding onto the hem of his sweatshirt, her hands sticky from candied apples. He can see her eyes starting to droop, and every few seconds, her head drops a little bit before jerking back upright. Izuku can’t help the fond smile on his face when he sees it, but he still feels a little bad that he can’t carry both of them.

“We’re here, Eri,” Izuku says, keeping his voice low. He’d figured out after she jumped a few times that loud voices scared her, so he’s being careful, now. Eri looks up at him, blinking sleepily.

“We’re here?” she asks, reaching up to rub at one of her eyes. She yawns, wide, and Izuku can’t help but smile as he leans forward, moving one of his hands to quickly open the door to the faculty dorm before moving his hand back to support Mouse’s leg. He nudges the door the rest of the way open with his shoulder, savoring the warmth that leaks out from the open door. He nods at the room, and Eri seems to understand, taking a few steps inside. Izuku follows after her, using a foot

to gently kick the door shut behind him.

The lights are on inside, illuminating the common room with warm light. It's comfortable, temperature wise, and it's making Izuku feel sleepy, himself. He yawns, leaning his head down to smother the motion in his shoulder, since he can't exactly cover his mouth. He startles when he hears a chuckle from further in the room, and he looks up to see Mirio standing up from one of the couches, stretching.

"You look about as tired as they do!" Mirio says, grinning. Izuku opens his mouth to reply, but before he gets the chance, Eri is pulling away from him and running across the room, practically launching herself at Mirio.

"Mirio!" she says, wrapping her arms around Mirio's legs. "Izuku got me a candy apple!" She looks up at Mirio, a bright grin crossing her face. Mirio looks down at her, smiling almost as wide.

"That's awesome, Eri!" he says, glancing up at Izuku. "Why don't you put Mouse down on the couch? I can get her into bed in a moment." He nods his head at the couch he'd just gotten off of, and Izuku nods in return, walking over to the couch and carefully lowering Mouse down onto it. She doesn't wake up, but she does make a little sniffing noise, turning and mashing the side of her face against the couch cushions. Izuku grimaces a little, hoping that the sauce stains he hadn't been able to completely get rid of wouldn't stain the couch.

"How's your recovery coming along?" Mirio asks, and Izuku blinks, looking up at him. It takes Izuku a moment to remember, and then he's reaching down, his hand hovering over where he'd been shot.

"Oh, I'm--I'm almost completely healed," he says, biting at his lower lip. "I, uh, I just need--I just need to avoid getting hit there, but I'm okay." Izuku swallows. "What about... what about you?" he asks, because he doesn't want to outright ask, doesn't want to mention Mirio losing his quirk. He knows that Mirio knows that Izuku has a quirk, now--Aizawa had said Nighteye would certainly tell Mirio. Izuku thinks he might tell Mirio himself, if he didn't already know. *He's quirkless, now*, Izuku thinks. *He'd deserve to know that I... that I'm not, not really.* It feels wrong to even think that he isn't quirkless, that it doesn't apply to him, but Izuku doesn't have time to think through that, not right now.

"I'm doing great!" Mirio says, giving Izuku a thumbs up. "Other than my quirk, I'm totally healed," he says, and Izuku can't help the little flinch that goes through him at that. He hears Mirio sigh. "Don't look so down, Deku," Mirio says, giving a little shake of his head. "If anyone knows that you don't need a quirk to be a hero, it'd be you," he says, his smile stretching a little wider. Izuku blinks, shaking his head.

"But I--I have a quirk," Izuku says, swallowing. "I'm not--it was a lie," he says. Mirio tilts his head to the side slightly, still smiling.

"But nobody who read your application or graded your entrance exam knew that, right?" Mirio shrugs. "There are plenty of heroes who don't have combat-oriented quirks who still become pros." Mirio pauses, and Izuku catches the swallow, the hesitance to his words. "I'm going to... I'm sure I'll get my quirk back," he says, glancing to the side. "But even if I never do, I'm going to find a way," he says, looking back at Izuku, his eyes bright. Izuku blinks, then nods.

"R-Right!" Izuku says, giving Mirio a smile. "If anyone can do it, it's--it's you," he says, but his mind is elsewhere. As Mirio looks down at Mouse, says something soft to Eri, Izuku is remembering how this all started. Izuku remembers how, when he'd first gotten this quirk, first figured it out, he'd done everything he could to *find a way* to be a hero. He'd tried, time and time

again, until he got it right. Izuku doesn't think he's been doing that, lately.

Izuku wonders if, maybe, he should be trying harder.

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When he goes back to the tower that weekend, they still haven't told Shinsou. Izuku doesn't know for sure, really, but he knows that Shinsou isn't acting any different. Izuku thinks that Shinsou would be angry, more than anything. In some ways, he reminds Izuku of Kacchan. The thing is, when Izuku's scared, when he's hurt and beaten down, he gives up. He goes quiet, kills himself quietly in the bathroom, lets the person who made him feel small do it again and again. Izuku'd done it in middle school, letting the bullies beat him up because he'd rather not fight. He's been doing it now, with Fury and Rivera, letting them make decisions for him, letting them rule his life in different ways.

But when Kacchan is scared, when something makes *him* feel small, he bites back. Shinsou is like that, too, Izuku thinks, just with snarky comments and insults instead of explosions and fists. Izuku doesn't think there's even a chance that Shinsou would hear about it and simply not react at all, not give any signs.

So, when Izuku goes to the tower that Saturday, it's alone. Haruta isn't reporting back in person, this weekend, and Izuku is standing in the lobby of the Gekkeiju tower alone, waiting for Manami to show up. Yamamoto doesn't glance up at him, but she also doesn't tell him which room to go to, so he figures that Manami will come to get him in person again. The formal clothes he's wearing feel familiar, now, in a way that they never did when he first started wearing them; they'd felt itchy, stiff, uncomfortable. Izuku wonders how much of that is because of the fabric being worn soft from use and how much of it is because Izuku has grown used to wearing the outfit.

The doors to the elevator make a soft swishing sound when they open, and Izuku turns instinctively to look. Manami hops out of the elevator, wearing a thick, cream-colored sweater and a navy blue, pleated skirt. She's wearing a pair of knee high socks, too, the same color as her sweater, and Izuku can't see the usual cuts on her thighs--the skirt is longer than her usual one. Her hair is up in the customary pigtails, and she skips over to Izuku with a bright smile on her face.

"Hi, Midoriya!" she says, stopping just in front of him, close enough that Izuku takes a step back. He can see the hearts in her eyes, but they don't surprise him--he hands are clasped together behind her back.

"H-Hi," Izuku says, swallowing. He still feels like he should be expecting pain, when he comes here, but he's not quite as nervous as he was the last time.

"I wanna watch TV," Manami says, her voice high pitched and almost childish. Izuku blinks. It's strangely reminiscent of the two girls he'd watched, just yesterday, at the festival. Before Izuku gets a chance to respond, Manami is walking over to the couch in the area around the television in the lobby, throwing herself down onto it. Izuku swallows, lifting his duffel bag from off of the floor and walking over to stand by the couch. Manami is lying on her stomach on it, and she looks up at him, grinning.

"Sit," she says, waving a hand at one of the other couches, a smaller, two-seated one, angled perpendicular to the one she's on. "No point in you standing, right?"

"R-Right," Izuku says, walking over to the other couch and sitting down on the edge of the seat. He watches as Manami wriggles forward to grab a remote off of the coffee table in front of her, then angles it toward the television. The screen comes on, showing the news, and Manami relaxes

her arm, setting the remote on the ground and staring at the screen. There's nothing exciting on screen, not to Izuku at least, but Manami seems enthralled by the weather report for the upcoming week.

"How'd your mission go?" Manami asks, a cheerful tone to her voice. Izuku reaches down, unzipping his bag to pull out the report that he'd prepared for her, another stack of neatly handwritten papers.

"I-I got notes on the students you asked about," Izuku says, taking the papers out. Manami hums from her spot on the couch.

"Put them on the table," she says, her eyes sliding shut. "I'll get them later." Izuku blinks, swallowing as he does as she says, sliding the papers on the wooden table. They make a soft noise, like a whisper, as they rub against the wood.

"Are you... are you high?" Izuku asks, swallowing around the nerves in his throat. He doesn't want to get hurt, but he doesn't want to just let other people drag him around, either. *I have to start asking more questions*, he tells himself. *If I can get information, I can get Haruta out safely, without Rivera stopping me. I'm not going to wait for them to decide it's time.* Izuku watches as Manami opens an eye, her heart shaped pupil finding Izuku's face. Izuku wonders if Rivera really plans on getting Haruta out, after all. Someone had lied in that conversation, or at least Izuku suspects that they had, based on how Tsukauchi and Nighteye had been acting.

"Yeah, I am," Manami says, her eyes shutting again. "Why wouldn't I be?" she asks, snorting out a laugh as she does. Izuku presses the palms of his hands into his thighs, trying to ground himself without making any sound, without giving himself away.

"I've never--I've never tried drugs," Izuku says, biting at his lower lip. "Why did you--why'd you start?" he asks, trying to inject curiosity into his voice. Manami blinks her eyes open, twisting to look at him better. She props herself up on her elbows, tilting her head to the side. Izuku can see the hearts fade from her eyes, and he thinks that surprise, that a moment of shock, must put her emotions at zero for just long enough to shut off her quirk.

"I just did," Manami says, watching him with amber eyes. "Do you want to try? I have pretty much everything," she says, blinking. Izuku swallows, shaking his head.

"Um, no, I-I don't want to--" he cuts himself off, feeling his brow furrow. "I don't want to not be myself," he says, truthfully. Manami hums, reaching up to prop up her chin with the palm of her hand. Izuku sees her quirk activate, the ripples of rainbow, but the heart in her eyes doesn't last even a moment.

"I started when me, Sumimi, and Kazuo were alone," Manami says. "We were selling Kazuo's quirk." She meets Izuku's eyes, nodding a little as she speaks. "It's basically drugs, you know? Heaven, anyway. A lotta the people who tried to attack us had the real stuff on them, so we had some. I figured, why not?" she shrugs. "Mom wouldn't let me do them again until recently." Izuku blinks.

"Mom?" he asks. He thinks he can remember Manami calling Sasaki that, once before.

"Yeah," Manami says, her smile dropping and her eyes glancing down. "She said I could call her mom, and I think it makes her happy, so I do. She's way better than my real mom." Izuku swallows. He's not sure if he should test his luck or not, but he figures that, if he messes up *really* badly, Manami at least will just kill him.

“Where... where’s your real mom?” Izuku asks, squeezing his fingers into his palms. Manami blinks, looking at him. She tilts her head to the side, slightly.

“I killed her,” Manami says, her voice innocent and almost confused, like she had thought he’d already known. Izuku swallows, feeling the muscles in his back tense up. He’d almost forgotten, but Manami is a killer, too. Even if she doesn’t hurt him, she’s dangerous.

Izuku knows he should ask more questions, knows he should get more information even if it kills him, but his heart is pounding too hard in his throat for him to form any more words. Instead, he sits and watches TV with Manami, every muscle in his body coiled tight, until the sky outside grows dark and Manami tells him he can go, smiling as if nothing happened.

Chapter End Notes

content warnings: drug use (not by izuku)

[discord!](#) [carrd!](#)

i hope you enjoyed!!!! hopefully the every other day schedule isn't too bad--i know it's half as often as before, but at least it's still pretty frequent!!! thank you guys so so much for the support!!

nightmare

Chapter Summary

last time: izuku gets caught sneaking out by shinsou. the festival happens and the girls are cute! izuku learns some deep manami lore including that she did a wee bit of matricide

Chapter Notes

HELLO GAMERS AND NON-GAMERS. i am having an epic poggers weekend and i hope you are too! i think there's a holiday or something idk i don't keep up with jesus and his dudes but if you celebrate i hope it's going pog-ily for you :D

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

It's pure luck that Izuku's burner phone is even *on* when the phone call comes in. Izuku's sitting at his desk in his dorm room, sharpening one of his knives against a whetstone with his door locked tight and his burner phone sitting on the surface of his desk beside him when it starts ringing. It vibrates, making a loud buzz against the wood, startling Izuku so badly that he jumps, his blade sliding forward and cutting a thin line on the side of his middle finger. Izuku hisses, clenching his injured left hand into a fist and dropping the knife to the desk with a clatter before picking up his flip phone and opening it. Miura's the one calling; Izuku answers, pressing the phone to his ear.

"Hello?" he says, standing up from his desk. He can feel blood starting to leak out of the slice in his finger as he fumbles his way over to his closet, where his first aid supplies are.

"Ace," Miura says, her voice distorted slightly over the receiver. "Is now a good time for you to talk?" she asks. Izuku knows what she's really asking--if he's alone, if he can talk without anyone listening in. Izuku feels pretty secure, in his dorm room. If nobody had ever woken up because of him screaming at his nightmares, then nobody would overhear a quiet conversation.

"I'm alone," Izuku replies, reaching into the cardboard box and wincing as something rough rubs against the cut on his finger. "I can--I can talk." He pulls out one of the first aid kits that his mother had given him, a red case with a zipper on the side. He sits on the floor, holding the case still with his feet while he unzips it with one hand. *Do flip phones have speaker mode?* he wonders as he opens up the first aid kit.

"Good," Miura says, and there's a pause as Izuku can hear her sighing through the line. "Manami's out on a mission right now, and she asked me to update you on your tasks," she says. Izuku swallows as he pulls a bandage out of the kit.

"What--what is it?" Izuku asks, staring at the bandage. It's in the sterile paper wrapper, but Izuku has no idea how he's going to get it open with just one hand. A bead of opaque red blood rolls off the side of his injured finger and plops onto Izuku's dark green rug. Izuku grimaces as he watches it soak into the fibers, hoping that it won't stain.

“You’re going to be investigating the houses of three kids,” Miura says. “Manami said that they’d be the fourth, sixth, and seventh on your list from last time. I don’t have the names.” Izuku nods, pressing his thumb into the cut on his middle finger and hoping that it stems the flow of blood.

“Okay,” Izuku says, then takes a breath. “Um. Are you alone?” he asks, because he’d really rather not ask Miura things where Fury could hear. Miura sighs.

“I’m at the store, so yes,” she says. Izuku thinks he can hear a hint of fondness in her voice, and suddenly, he finds himself missing those days when Miura had just been the friendly girl at the hardware store who knew a little too much about knives. Miura had seemed so happy, then. So free.

“Are you--how are you doing?” Izuku asks, and he knows from the long pause on the other end of the phone that Miura doesn’t think he’s asking just to be polite. She sighs after a moment.

“Kazuo broke my fingers,” she says, after a moment. “Just four of them.” Izuku swallows, his throat dry.

“Oh,” he says, then, “I’m sorry.” There’s static on the other end of the line, then a sigh, soft and slow.

“It is what it is,” Miura says. “Manami isn’t like Kazuo,” she says, after a moment. “She won’t hurt you.” Izuku wonders if Miura is talking about herself. Izuku swallows.

“She said--she said that she killed her mother,” Izuku says, his voice small. “And that you three were--you were alone?” His voice pitches up at the end, turning it into a question. Izuku hears a long stretch of nothing, then the sound of someone breathing in.

“I’ve been living with Manami and Kazuo since I was four,” she says. “Manami’s mother and father died when I was six.” Izuku swears he can hear her swallow. “I have to go, Ace,” she says.

“O-Okay,” Izuku says, then, “I’m sorry.” He’s not sure if he’s apologizing for what happened, or for asking. He hears Miura breathe out a little sound that might be a laugh.

“Goodnight,” she says, and the other end of the line clicks off before Izuku can reply.

Izuku sets the phone down on his rug, blinking. He sits like that for just a moment before he moves, unwrapping the bandage and sealing it over the cut on his finger. It’s not deep and it’s not ragged, but it’s still bleeding, and it leaves a small red spot where the blood starts to soak through the bandage. Izuku watches the blotted blood grow into a larger patch, until it isn’t growing anymore.

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When Izuku wakes from a nightmare for the third time in the same night, he’s on the floor already by the time he wakes up. He’s covered in a thin layer of sweat, fasting-drying on his skin, even under his long sleeves, and he’s braced on his elbows against the floor, panting and gasping for breath like he’d just finished a fight, like he hadn’t just been asleep in bed. It feels both too hot and too cold in the room, like he’s sick or something, and Izuku can’t move for a long moment, just staying there on his knees and elbows. He’s not sure if it’s because of how *exhausted* he is, or if it’s from lingering terror. Izuku can’t even remember what he’d dreamed about.

He has a theory, though. He seems to have the same three kinds of dreams, on nights like these, the same general idea even if the content of the dream isn’t exact. Sometimes, he dreams of Heaven. Those dreams are surreal, bright-colored and sickeningly sweet. Izuku can never tell if Heaven is

better in reality or in the dreams, and it makes him want to experience it again, if only to know for sure. Either way, when he wakes from those, his muscles and joints ache, like they're reminding him that the real world isn't so nice, isn't so gentle.

Izuku also dreams of the morgue. Those dreams are silent, oppressive, and they're the ones that he usually wakes up screaming from. He's always left with a lingering sense of being alone, that if he were to run down the halls and throw open the doors to his friends' rooms, he'd find nothing. He'd be in an empty world, with nothing but himself.

Izuku thinks that, tonight, he'd dreamed the third kind. He doesn't wake screaming from those, doesn't wake up with pain that seems too sharp, too bright in his bones, but they're just as terrifying. Izuku thinks that he dreams of failing to save people the most often. The other night, it had been Mouse, her body limp and pale on the ground. Earlier tonight, it had been Haruta, hanging from the noose in Izuku's closet. Izuku might not be able to remember his dream right now, but he's sure it would be worse, if he did. He doesn't want to have to think about it, to have to see it in his mind, over and over again.

Izuku finally extracts himself from his rug, pulling back to sit on his knees beside his bed. He's shaking like he's cold, like he's out in the biting wind outside. Izuku forces himself to take a deep breath, pressing the palms of his hands into his thighs for a moment to steady himself, before he stands. He sits on his bed, pulling his phone off of his nightstand. It's 4:06 in the morning. Izuku had only been asleep for about an hour since his last dream.

Izuku swallows, his throat feeling thick as he stares blankly at his phone screen. He doesn't want to go back to sleep. He doesn't want to wake up, shaking and sweaty and terrified, doesn't want to fall out of bed or scream or cry in his sleep. But, the thing is, Izuku is just so *tired*. His limbs feel heavy, like they're laced with lead and steel, and his eyes feel swollen, puffy. Like they're meant to be shut, like he should be lying in bed. Even though he's disgusting, sweaty and shaking, his bed feels wonderfully warm, too. Izuku wants to turn and curl up in it, wants to soak up the warmth and let his eyes slide shut.

Izuku swallows, switching off his phone screen and putting it back on his nightstand. It feels like a dirty trick, like it's unfair that Izuku should want to sleep, knowing how it'll end. It's deceptive, and as much as Izuku knows that, as much as he knows that he'll resent himself for going back to bed if he does right now, he still wants to. Izuku lets his eyes shut for a moment, still sitting upright on his bed, and even that small rest feels blissful. Izuku breathes in the quiet space of his room, and he can feel himself drifting away again before he pries his eyes open. *I can't do that again*, he thinks, his mind on a few minutes ago, waking up on the rug with adrenaline racing through his veins. Izuku swallows, and he stands up.

He doesn't consciously think about it, as he walks to his door and unlocks it, stepping out into the hallway. He doesn't think that it's something he's ever thought about directly, as he walks the short distance to stand in front of Shinsou's door. It's warmer in the hallway than it is in his bedroom, and it feels nice, the sweat on his skin having dried and left him chilly under his pajamas. Izuku wonders, briefly, what on earth he's doing. He raises a fist, rapping his knuckles against Shinsou's door quietly, just loud enough that Shinsou might hear it if he's already awake. Izuku doesn't want to wake him up, not for something as silly as this.

A moment passes, just enough time that Izuku starts to feel stupid, just enough for him to tell himself that there was no way that Shinsou would be awake, that he's being ridiculous and selfish and weak. It's just enough time that Izuku manages to be startled by the door to Shinsou's room opening, slowly moving inward. Shinsou's in the doorway, looking exhausted but not bleary, not like he'd just woken up. There are a pair of bulky black headphones around his neck, and he's got a

smear of pen ink on his lower lip.

“You should knock louder,” Shinsou says, looking Izuku up and down. “I thought I’d imagined it.” He arches an eyebrow. “No secret mission tonight?” Izuku blinks, then shakes his head.

“No, I--” Izuku swallows. He knows that he looks like a mess, that his hair is ruffled and his skin is pale and clammy. He knows that he has bags under his eyes that rival Shinsou’s. “I keep waking up,” he says, quietly. Shinsou stares at him for a long moment, his face unmoving, before he steps back, opening his door further.

“We don’t want to wake anyone up,” Shinsou says, turning and walking into his room. Izuku blinks, stepping into Shinsou’s room and pulling the door shut behind him.

It doesn’t look much different from the last time Izuku had been here, really. The bed is made neatly with the sheets and comforter that Todoroki had paid for with Endeavor’s card on one of their trips to the mall, way back when Shinsou had first joined the class. There’s a pile of pillows on the bed, courtesy of Yaoyorozu, who had packed too many, with a couple on the floor, which is bare despite Izuku offering to buy Shinsou a rug. Shinsou’s desk is covered with notebooks and papers, scattered across the surface along with pens of multiple colors. It’s clear from the bottle of water on the desk and the blanket resting beside the chair that Shinsou had been up studying. Izuku wonders if he’d slept at all, or if he’d tried and failed. He’s mentioned his insomnia a few times before, mostly in passing.

Shinsou sits in his chair, a position that Izuku has seen him in countless times before while they both studied. *We haven’t done that in a while*, Izuku thinks, swallowing. *I’ve been too busy*.

“Spill,” Shinsou says. Izuku blinks, and he must look confused, because Shinsou sighs, his eyes narrowing. “What’s waking you up?” he asks, and Izuku swallows.

“I-I keep having, um, nightmares,” Izuku says, staring down at the ground. Shinsou’s floor is a little dusty, and Izuku almost wants to offer to clean it, if only to tire himself out a little so that he can sleep.

“Hm,” Shinsou hums, turning his head to the side, his brows furrowing slightly. “Do you... want to talk about it?” Shinsou’s lips twitch slightly. “I’m not really the best at that, sorry.” Izuku shakes his head. He hadn’t really necessarily thought it directly, but he knows that’s not why he’s here. Izuku sighs.

“Um, actually,” Izuku says, fidgeting. “I was wondering if--if you can make people sleep, without d-dreams, with your quirk.” Izuku doesn’t want to look at Shinsou, but there isn’t much else to look in the room. Shinsou stares at him with a level gaze, tipping his head to the side, slightly.

“I could try,” Shinsou says. “I’m not sure if it would work after I release my control on you, and I can’t hold it all night, though,” he says, glancing to the side. He pauses, for a moment, then looks back to Izuku. “Do you want me to try?” he asks.

Izuku nods. “Y-Yes, please,” he says, and he feels Shinsou’s quirk soak into him, dulling his senses and making everything feel distant, foggy. Izuku feels himself relaxing. He can vaguely see Shinsou sigh, running a hand through his hair.

“Go sit on my bed,” Shinsou says. Izuku’s body moves without him being told to, and it reminds him of when Sasaki gave him a memory. It’s not restraining in the way that Izuku thinks people would assume it was--it’s just like his body is moving on its own, easy, comfortable movements. Izuku sits on the bed, his hands in his lap.

“Lie down,” Shinsou says. He stands up as Izuku lies down, moving to stand over Izuku. He looks down at Izuku with hooded eyes, his violet gaze on Izuku’s face.

“You really trust me, don’t you,” Shinsou says. It’s not a question, the way he says it, and briefly, Izuku can see something that might be sadness on Shinsou’s face, but Izuku isn’t sure. Shinsou breathes out, slowly.

“Sleep without dreams,” Shinsou says, and the world fades away softly, into darkness.

--

Izuku wakes up to a hand nudging his shoulder, shaking him gently. Izuku blinks his eyes open, confused when he sees Shinsou sitting in front of him, wearing the long-sleeved undershirt of their winter uniform.

“Time to get up,” Shinsou says, standing up and pulling away from Izuku. Izuku can see that he’s wearing the slacks of the uniform, too, and Izuku sits up, blinking.

“What time is it?” Izuku asks, his voice thick with sleep. Shinsou snorts, moving over to his desk and shuffling papers around, stacking them on top of one another.

“Seven,” Shinsou says. Izuku blinks, looking around. Memories of last night start to filter back to Izuku, and as he rubs at his eyes, he looks at Shinsou.

“Did you--did you sleep at all?” Izuku asks. Shinsou glances back at him, eyebrows raised.

“Yeah, I napped,” Shinsou says. “Don’t worry about it.” He glances back over to his desk, picking up the stack of papers and shoving it into the backpack sitting at his chair. “You should probably go get ready,” Shinsou says, not looking over to Izuku. Izuku swallows, before getting up.

“Thanks, um, for last night,” Izuku says, feeling strange and awkward. Shinsou hums, still organizing his backpack.

“It’s fine,” Shinsou says, absently, like he’s not really paying attention. “I sleep better in the same room as other people, anyway.” Izuku blinks, about to ask about that, but Shinsou steps away from his bag, moving to the door.

“I’m going to go get breakfast,” Shinsou says, casting a glance back at Izuku. “You should hurry up. You don’t have a ton of time,” he says, putting his hand on the doorknob and turning the handle. Izuku watches him go, feeling like the entire conversation had moved so fast that he hadn’t had a chance to process it, to respond. Izuku sighs, standing up from Shinsou’s bed. Even though he’s still tired, that was the most he’d slept continuously in weeks.

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Homeroom starts slowly, with Aizawa shuffling into the classroom, his eyes half-shut with exhaustion, his hands tucking into the pocket of his uniform. Izuku is sitting in his desk, leaning against the wooden surface of it with his elbows. He’s trying to pay attention to Aizawa, really, but the teacher isn’t saying anything, isn’t doing anything other than reorganizing the papers at the front of the room. Instead of watching him, Izuku looks out the windows along the side of the classroom. Outside, a few flakes of snow drift lazily through the sky. Izuku doesn’t think it’s cold enough for it to stick, but it’s pretty, and the sky is a dove-grey that makes all of campus look wintery and neat. It makes sense, now that it’s December.

“Alright,” Aizawa says, clearing his throat. Izuku looks up at him, where he’s standing at the

podium and facing the class. "As I'm sure you're all aware, we're coming up on winter break," Aizawa says, pausing as the class erupts in whispers and murmurs. Izuku blinks. He hadn't realized that it was so close to the break, even with the changing of the months and the snowy weather.

"We've got one major event this trimester, so don't go messing up your sleep schedules just yet," Aizawa says, his gaze moving over the class. "Along with the paper exams, there will also be a joint training session with class 1-B that acts in the place of your practical exams." Aizawa reaches up, scratching the skin just under his scar. "You'll each get put on two different teams and fight in two rounds. You'll be assessed based on the progress you've made since last trimester, but this exam isn't as big of a deal as the first and last trimesters, so please focus your studying on the paper exams." Aizawa's gaze moves over to stare pointedly at Kaminari and Ashido. "If you receive failing scores on those, you will be required to complete a remedial assignment over the break," he says.

Izuku ignores the groaning of Kaminari to his right, instead choosing to look to the window again. The snow has picked up, swirling gently as it falls from the sky. It's a little early in the year for it to be like this, and Izuku wonders if it's a sign that the winter will be unusually cold.

"Anyway, there's still two weeks left before break," Aizawa says, turning to the blackboard as Izuku looks over at him. "That's plenty of time for you to learn."

Izuku resists the urge to sigh. He watches the blackboard dutifully, but he can't help but think that this is a huge waste of his time. *First the festival, and now this*, Izuku thinks. He doesn't want to worry about school, doesn't want to play games and smile when he's spending more of his time thinking about the Gekkeiju, about getting Haruta and Miura somewhere safe and about keeping Shinsou from ending up in danger.

Izuku would prefer that he didn't have to worry about that, but, well, as long as he has no choice, he doesn't want any distractions.

--

Izuku's not surprised, really, when Neito comes running up to him on the walk back to the dorms from their afternoon classes. It's stopped snowing, and the snow on the ground has started to melt already, turning into a mess of dirty, icy slush. Izuku's walking back along the grass beside the sidewalk, trying to avoid the slick ice on the concrete, when Neito jogs over to him, a thick winter coat on over his uniform.

"Izuku!" Neito calls, stopping beside him. "Did Aizawa tell your class about the joint training?" he asks, tipping his head to the side. There's a smile on his face, a friendly one, and his eyes are their normal, half-lidded blue. Izuku smiles back at him, slowing his pace to match Neito's as they walk side by side, towards 1-A's dorm.

"He did," Izuku confirms, sighing. "I'm glad that we're--that we're not having a practical exam," he says. He can see the excitement on Neito's face, and while he doesn't necessarily want to ruin that, he's also not really in the mood to talk happily about school activities. Not only does he have to go out tonight in the wet, cold weather for his mission, but he also has to get information that might end in another kid being put in danger. Izuku isn't that worried about it, not when he's going to have Aizawa and Nezu and Nighteye helping him decide what he should tell the Gekkeiju and what he should hold back, but it doesn't make the bitter feeling that he's one of the bad guys any less miserable.

"Yeah, me too," Neito says, leaning back and stretching his hands above his head as he walks. He

glances over at Izuku. “You’ve been pretty busy lately, haven’t you? Everything going alright?” Izuku blinks, looking over at him.

“Y-Yeah, it’s fine,” he says, starting on the walk up the steps to the dorm room. Neito is right in line with him, taking the stairs two at a time.

“You look like you haven’t been sleeping,” Neito comments, and Izuku swallows at being read so easily, watching as Neito watches him from the sides of his eyes. “Is something going on?” Izuku knows that he’s asking about Izuku’s work as Ace, about his missions, but Izuku knows that Neito is fully aware that Izuku isn’t supposed to talk about it, not blatantly, anyway. Izuku sighs, looking down at the concrete below him as they make their way up the steps.

“Yeah,” Izuku says. “There’s some, uh, some things going on.” He sticks his hands in the pockets of his uniform blazer, too aware of Neito’s eyes on him as they reach the door to the dorm building. Izuku tugs it open, holding the door open for Neito to walk through.

“Is there anything I can do to help?” Neito asks, as he walks through the door, speaking quietly and looking back at Izuku over his shoulder. Izuku swallows, thinking as he follows Neito through the door and into the dorm. Inside, it smells like cooking rice and seafood. Izuku wonders if Kacchan’s already started cooking.

“Just... just sit with me?” Izuku asks, glancing over at Neito. “I don’t--I don’t want to do anything, I just want to--I just want to rest, and it’d be easier if--if we were hanging out,” Izuku says. He fidgets with his hands, wringing his fingers together until the skin burns and aches. Izuku stares down at his hands as Neito watches him, and he sees Neito reach out, gently pulling Izuku’s hands apart and holding them.

“Okay,” Neito says, and when Izuku looks up at him, he’s watching Izuku seriously. “I’ll ask Bakugou to make us something to eat, and we can watch TV or read or something, okay? Whatever you want to do,” he says, giving Izuku a small smile. Izuku feels the tension draining out of his shoulders, feels himself relaxing. He breathes out, feeling a small smile creep up his lips.

“Okay,” Izuku says. “Thank you, Neito. It--it means a lot,” he says. Neito smiles at him, rolling his eyes.

“It’s nothing,” Neito says, releasing Izuku’s hands and waving at the air. “This is what friends do, right?”

--

Izuku steps into Nezu’s office, wringing his hands together and biting at his lower lip nervously as he steps into the space. It’s late afternoon, just after classes have ended, and Izuku has had the entire day to be nervous about this meeting, even since Aizawa told him to *go see Nezu after class* and not given him so much as a hint as to what the meeting would be about. When Izuku steps into the office and sees Rivera sitting in the armchair next to where Nezu’s sitting, it does nothing to ease his nerves.

“Midoriya!” Nezu says brightly, leaning forward and setting down the cup of tea he’d been holding. “Come in, come in. I made tea,” he says, waving at a tray set on the table. There’s a cup there, waiting for Izuku. Izuku swallows, nudging the door shut with his foot as he walks inside. Rivera is watching him with a level gaze over his cup of tea, which he raises to his lips and slowly drinks from as Izuku sits down in one of the armchairs across the coffee table from the two of them.

“Don’t look so nervous,” Nezu says, chuckling under his breath. “You’re not in trouble, you know.” Nezu leans forward, picking up his cup of tea and taking a slow sip from it. Izuku copies him, reaching out to grab his own cup of tea, if only to have something to warm his hands. They’re still chilly from the December wind, and the heat that seeps through the cup and into Izuku’s fingers is comforting.

“We’ve made a decision about when Shinsou should be informed,” Rivera says, his face carefully blank. Izuku blinks, clutching the cup of tea tightly.

“What--what is it?” Izuku asks, leaning forward slightly. “When are we telling him?” Izuku watches Rivera sigh, his dark green eyes looking at his cup of tea. Izuku can see the man’s reflection in the reddish-brown water, rippling slightly.

“We’ll be informing him on the last day before the winter break,” Rivera says. “Shinsou does not leave campus during the term, not even on weekends, and Kojima has informed us that he is more likely to be taken when he is off campus. In order to keep the information secure if Shinsou should decide not to cooperate, we will be telling him when the last day of classes concludes.” Rivera glances up at Izuku, over the cup of tea. “While you are not required to be there, I thought you may wish to be part of the group that informs him,” he says, his gaze unreadable through narrowed eyes. Izuku swallows.

“That’s... how is he going to have any chance to make up his mind?” Izuku asks, feeling his brows furrow. “Shouldn’t he--shouldn’t he get time to think about it?”

“This is a final decision,” Rivera says. “I’m only informing you as a courtesy.” He pauses, looking at Izuku. “I have heard that your own investigations are revealing information on the Gekkeiju’s origins.” Izuku blinks, then nods.

“Um, y-yeah,” Izuku says. “Mostly--mostly stuff that Manami is telling me,” he says. Rivera nods.

“I’ll be interested to hear what went on in the nine years that Phosgene had disappeared for,” Rivera says. “In the meantime, please continue to cooperate with the Gekkeiju.” Izuku waits, but it doesn’t seem that Rivera is going to say anything else. Izuku swallows, gripping his cup tighter. He wonders if it’ll break, if he holds it tight enough.

“Is there--isn’t there a plan to take them down?” Izuku asks, leaning forward. “You have to--you have to have some kind of plan. We can’t just--just be biding time,” Izuku says, desperately. Rivera just watches him, blinking slowly, his face completely unfazed.

“There is a plan,” Rivera says, evenly. “We are looking for the best opportunity to launch that plan. Until such a time presents itself, you need to be patient, Midoriya.” He speaks almost condescendingly, and even though Izuku might be imagining the patronizing tone to Rivera’s voice, he still grits his teeth as he sets the cup of tea down on the tray again before standing up.

“Thanks for telling me, I guess,” Izuku bites out, glaring at Rivera. “It’d be nice if--if you would care about our wellbeing, too.” Rivera looks up at him, tilting his head to the side slightly, but it’s Nezu who speaks next.

“Don’t worry, Midoriya,” Nezu says, his voice kind and warm. “We’re not making you do this for nothing. We really are very close to being able to raid the Gekkeiju, I think. Don’t you agree, Rivera?” Izuku watches Nezu glance to the side, his eyes glittering with something dark as he looks at Rivera. Rivera’s eyes narrow slightly, and he sighs.

“Closer than we’ve ever been before,” Rivera mutters. Izuku frowns, starting to open his mouth to

reply, but he thinks better of it. He shuts his mouth, swallows, and takes a deep breath.

“I’m going to go study for my exams now,” Izuku says, directing his words at Nezu. Nezu nods, waving a paw.

“Go ahead,” he says, smiling. “I’ll let Aizawa know if I have anything else for you.” Izuku nods, turning on his heels and walking to the door. As he’s turning the handle, he hears Rivera speak.

“Wait,” he says, his voice rough. Izuku turns, looking over his shoulder. Rivera is watching him, his cup of tea held in his lap.

“What?” Izuku asks, feeling very little patience for Rivera at this moment. Rivera stares back at him, then sighs.

“For our plan, we need the lieutenants to all be on the same mission,” Rivera says. “If you hear of them considering anything like that, please let us know.” Izuku blinks. He would tell them about that either way, and he knows that Rivera knows that. *He’s trying to tell me something*, Izuku realizes. *Does he feel bad, for what I’m having to do?*

“I’ll let you know,” Izuku says, turning back to the door. He steps out, into the hallway with a heaviness to his heart. There’s less than two weeks until Shinsou will know, until Izuku will have to watch his friend get hurt in the same way that he has been.

Chapter End Notes

content warning: i think??? none??? please lmk if i missed one LOL

[discord!](#) [carrd!](#)

i hope you're all pogging well!!! im gonna game with my bf now and paint because im?? actually ahead on coursework it's AMAZING what writing half as much has done for my free time LMAO

joint training arc, part 1

Chapter Summary

last time: izuku gets a call from miura, gets some sleep help from shinsou, hangs with monoma, hears about the joint training, and learns some stuff from the asshole (rivera)

Chapter Notes

this doesn't /technically/ contain any manga spoilers except for like.... the quirks of the 1-B students

also yes this is a little filler-ish at least near the end imma be real school is INSANE lately but also we needed some lighter scenes before the uh..... yeah.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

It's strange, returning to the hardware store after all this time. It's exactly how Izuku remembers it, down to the bell that rings when he pushes open the door and Miura, sitting behind the counter with an apron on over a thick, knit sweater and black jeans. She startles when Izuku enters, blinking at him over rectangular glasses that Izuku had completely forgotten she even wore. She turns to him, setting down a book that she'd been reading as he lets the door fall shut behind him, the bell jangling as the door slots into place.

It's warm in the shop, and Izuku can feel that his cheeks are flushed from the cold, can feel them stinging as they warm back up. He's wearing an oversized sweatshirt and jeans, but he's not quite warm enough, even with his hands wrapped up in his sleeves. He really should be shopping for better winter clothes--he's outgrown most of the ones that he wore last winter. Instead, he's here, staring at Miura, suddenly unsure of what to say. She looks almost *normal* with her hair in two pigtails and a startled look on her face.

The illusion is ruined when Izuku glances down at her hands, sees dark purple bruises turning yellow and green in places. He can tell right away which of her fingers are broken--they're in splints, swollen and bruised where they're visible. Izuku swallows. As much as he's been avoiding Fury's wrath, lately, as much as he's been getting lucky, the same can't be said for Miura and Haruta. It makes him think that, maybe, he should be getting hurt, too. It seems like it would only be fair.

"Midoriya," Miura says, tipping her head to the side slightly. "What can I help you with?" She looks confused, probably wondering why Izuku is coming here, of all places. Izuku gives her a half-hearted smile.

"I, um, could use a new sharpening kit," Izuku says. "I also wanted to--to talk to you," he adds, because he doesn't want to trick her, doesn't want to be subtle about this. Miura blinks, then smiles, slightly.

"I can help you with the sharpening kit," she says, sighing as she stands up. "I'm not sure about the

talking, though.” Izuku nods as she walks out from around the counter, moving confidently. She seems much more confident, more comfortable in the shop. It’s a stark contrast to how she acts at the tower, all controlled and stiff and still. She starts walking down an aisle, and Izuku follows her, recognizing it as an aisle she’s led him down more than a few times before. She stops in front of the whetstones and sharpening kits and pulls off a set of three whetstones, identical to the ones Izuku uses now. She turns, handing them to him.

“Thanks,” Izuku says, holding them in his hands. They’re heavy and cool, the weight familiar in his hands. Miura nods.

“What did you want to talk about?” she asks, not quite looking at him. Izuku glances down at the whetstones, running the skin of his thumb over the one with the finest grain. It feels smooth to the touch.

“Why--why haven’t you left the Gekkeiju?” Izuku asks. He watches Miura’s gaze turn to him sharply, and he raises one hand, as if in apology. “I-I mean, you’re strong enough to defend yourself against them r-right? So why haven’t you left?”

Izuku watches as Miura sighs, bringing a hand up to chest height and staring at it, like she’s examining the bruising on her fingers. Her dark eyes are half-lidded, and Izuku notices the bags under her eyes. He watches as she closes her hand into a fist, and he winces empathetically. *That must hurt*, he thinks. *Her fingers are still broken, after all*.

“I can’t,” Miura says, glancing up at him. “You’re right, that I probably could get away.” She breathes out. “But I don’t think I could stay in Japan. And I don’t think I could be with... with Ren,” she says, sighing. Izuku swallows.

“With Ren?” he asks, watching as Miura presses her lips together, glancing down.

“Ren saved me,” Miura says, quietly. “I don’t know how much she’s told you,” Miura says, her voice clipped. Izuku shakes his head.

“She hasn’t told me anything,” Izuku says. “But you two--you’re close, right?” He watches Miura glance back over to him, a strand of dark hair falling out of one of her pigtails and resting on her forehead. She reaches up, tucking it behind her ear.

“Something like that,” Miura says, a soft smile on her lips. She sighs, turning and walking down the aisle, back to the front of the store. Izuku trails behind her, watching as she walks to the counter and rustles around for a moment before pulling something from a box sitting beside the register.

“Here,” Miura says, holding her hand out. “My birthday is the twelfth,” she says as Izuku sticks his hand out. “If you could... give this to Ren. She’ll know it’s from me.” Izuku blinks as Miura drops something heavy and cold into the palm of his hand.

“Aren’t you supposed to *get* gifts on your birthday, not give them?” Izuku asks, pulling his hand back to look at the object. It’s a small figurine, made of blue-ish grey metal that Izuku suspects is lead. It’s shaped like a rabbit, except it has a pair of feathered wings and a halo resting on its head. Its head is tilted back, with its ears pressed down like it’s stretching up to stare at the sky. Izuku swallows.

“Knowing she’s safe is a gift enough for me,” Miura says, her voice quiet and soft. Izuku looks up at her to see a fond look on her face, subtle, but there nonetheless. Izuku smiles back, closing his palm over the rabbit and nodding.

“I’ll--I’ll get it to her,” Izuku says. Miura’s smile widens.

“The whetstones are on the house,” she says, nodding to the stack of stones in Izuku’s other hand. Izuku blinks, glancing down at them.

“Are--are you sure?” Izuku asks. “Giving her the rabbit really isn’t--it’s not that much--” he starts, but Miura cuts him off with a slight smile.

“Midoriya,” she says, and he stops. “You’re a member of the Gekkeiju. You don’t have to pay for things like this.” Miura tips her head to the side slightly, a soft sigh escaping her. She pauses for a moment, like she’s waiting for something, and then she says, “Be careful, okay? It’s icy out.”

Izuku blinks, nodding. “I-I will,” he says, and he turns to the door, putting his hand on the handle before he turns back to look at Miura. “You--I’m going to help you,” Izuku says. “So that you--so you can be with Ren.” Izuku watches Miura blink, then sigh, her gaze cast down at the ground and a slight smile pulling at her lips.

“That sounds nice,” she says, before her smile drops and she looks back up. “Don’t endanger yourself for my sake,” Miura says, her voice suddenly sharp. “It’s not worth what you would have to go through.” Izuku blinks. He hesitates, unsure of what to do for a moment, and then he smiles. He looks at her, smiles wide, and pulls the door open.

“I’ll decide what’s worth it or not,” Izuku says, watching the startled look come over her face as he steps out of the shop into the cold winter air.

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On the morning of the joint training exercise, Izuku finds a shiny new costume case by his locker. His hands hover over it, knowing that, inside of it, there’s his brand-new winter costume. He’d sent in the costume request himself, basing it at least a little bit off of his current Ace outfit, but he’s still excited to see it in person. Izuku swallows, his hands going to the latches as he hears footsteps approach from behind him. Izuku glances over his shoulder to see Todoroki standing behind him, watching Izuku with a curious expression on his face and his head tipped slightly to the side.

“Your new costume?” Todoroki asks, nodding to the case. Izuku nods in response, undoing the two silver latches.

“Y-Yeah,” Izuku says, opening carefully, resting the two halves of it against the floor. At the top of the case is a pile of thick, warm-looking fabric in a deep, rich green. It’s a darker color than Izuku’s costumes have used before, nearly black, and it’s heavy when Izuku pulls it out from the case, holding it up to reveal a form-fitting, long sleeved top. Izuku moves it aside, setting it on the bench. Todoroki hums as Izuku pulls out arm guards nearly identical to the ones on his earlier costume, albeit with slots for a few more knives.

“I like the color,” Todoroki says. “It’s well suited for the season.” Izuku nods as he pulls out a multitude of knives, all pre-dulled for training. Izuku had told the support department that he had sharp ones, but he couldn’t exactly use those in normal training. Izuku tests one by pressing the blade into the flat of his thumb, satisfied with the way the edge digs into the pad of his thumb but doesn’t break the skin. It leaves a line of compressed skin when he pulls it away, but it fades after only a moment.

“I got--I got training knives,” Izuku says, turning to Todoroki and offering the knife. “See, they’re not sharp enough to hurt you guys!” Todoroki takes the knife from his hand, staring down at it. Izuku turns back to the case, pulling out the visor he’s requested. It’s a lot like his goggles from his

Ace costume, except the clear, durable material on this isn't reflective, isn't even tinted. Izuku hopes he can pass it off as being inspired by Hawks, if anyone asks. He'd really just wanted some eye protection, especially given that Kaminari keeps sending him videos of people putting knives in things and having them *explode*. Izuku would rather play it safe.

"A jacket?" Todoroki asks as Izuku pulls out the next piece of his costume. This is the part that's the most like his Ace costume, admittedly, but Izuku couldn't resist asking for the sleek black jacket, complete with green patches over the elbows. There isn't a hood on this one, mostly because he'd been afraid it would make him look a little *too* much like Ace, but there is a high, stiff collar, reinforced by armor to protect his neck. It feels strange, that this costume leaves his face exposed, but Izuku has to remind himself that biting is kind of part of his whole brand. It's odd. Izuku feels so far away from the version of himself that was biting people at the sports festival, too weak to do anything but fight dirty. Izuku knows he'd still need to fight dirty, now, but he suspects that he's grown a lot, since then.

"It's protective," Izuku explains, holding it up. "I had the support team reinforce it, so, um, it should guard against knife strikes." Izuku knows that one of the dangers of using knives is that it means a clever opponent can easily take one of his knives and use it against him. The fact that wearing a heavy jacket and a visor feel comforting, familiar to him has nothing to do with it.

"Oh," Todoroki says, tipping his head to the side. "Smart."

The rest of the costume is relatively unchanged, except it's made with thicker, warmer fabric. Izuku's pants are black, now, instead of the green they were before, and his black, steel-toed boots have dark green laces. His gloves are pretty much identical to before, the same strong green material. Izuku's razor teeth look the same, but he knows from what Hatsume had been telling him when he submitted his request that they'd made them so he was less likely to bite his own lip or tongue. Izuku doesn't really understand it, seeing as they look completely unchanged, but he's not going to question it.

"What's your new costume like?" Izuku asks, looking up at Todoroki. Todoroki blinks, holding out the hand holding the training knife. Izuku takes it from him, setting it down on top of the pile of knives inside the case.

"It's warmer," Todoroki says. Izuku stares at him for a moment, and Todoroki seems to get that Izuku wants more information. He sighs. "There's not much need for change. I can keep myself warm with my quirk," he says, and Izuku nods.

"That makes sense," he says, smiling. Todoroki nods as Izuku stands up, gathering the clothing portions of his costume.

"Well, I'm going to--to go change, now," Izuku says, nodding his head towards the private bathroom. Todoroki blinks, then swallows, his eyes moving to Izuku's arms.

"I haven't--I haven't seen much of you, lately," Todoroki says, quietly. "Are you... are you doing okay?" he asks. Izuku knows what he's asking. He nods, giving Todoroki a smile.

"I am," he says, reaching a hand up to rest it on top of his uniform blazer sleeve, where it covers the scars of his cuts. Izuku feels the warmth seeping through the fabric.

"Good," Todoroki says, tilting his head to the side. His eyes crinkle slightly as he smiles. "I'm glad."

--

Izuku thinks that, at least on some level, he expects the joint training to be exciting. He expects to feel nervous, expects to feel his heart pound in his chest when Aizawa and Vlad King are setting up the board that, when turned around, will show the match-ups for the fights, but, well, Izuku doesn't feel much at all. The joint training exercise should be exciting--it clearly is to his friends. Izuku just can't bring himself to find anything fun about it, to see the point in it at all. It's just an exercise in fighting--something Izuku knows how to do intimately, something Izuku wishes he didn't *need* to do, wishes wasn't necessary at all--and it's all pre-packaged for them, with pre-picked matches and pre-built fake cities. *It's not real*, Izuku thinks, and maybe that's the problem.

"I really hope I get paired with you, dude!" Kaminari says from beside him, leaning close to Izuku and grinning. "You were like, a huge help in the last exam, you know? I think we make a good team," he says, and Izuku forces himself to smile and nod in response.

"Y-Yeah," Izuku says. The truth is, he doesn't think that he and Kaminari have fighting styles that work together all that well. *Kaminari needs someone who can either resist his electricity or can fight from a distance*, Izuku thinks to himself. *Not someone like me, who has to be close to the enemy to fight them and gets hurt by Kaminari's quirk.*

"Deku works best with other close ranged fighters, idiot," Kacchan says, stomping over to the two of them. "He better be hoping to work with Ponytail or Glasses or the frog," Kacchan says, his eyes moving to Izuku's. Izuku blinks, then nods.

"Y-Yeah, I would fight b-better if--if the person I was working with could limit the enemy's mobility," Izuku says, swallowing. "Todoroki, Shinsou, and, um, Sero would also be good for that." Izuku watches a look of realization come over Kaminari's face.

"Ohh, that's smart!" Kaminari says, smiling. "Jeez, I'd never thought about it like that. You're good at stealth and stuff too though, right?" He tips his head to the side and Izuku hesitantly nods.

"Um, yeah," Izuku says, feeling his cheeks redden slightly. "I'm, um, I'm pretty good at--at maneuvering through the city," he says. "I'd probably do well with--with Shouji or Jirou, since they'd know where I was and stuff. Hagakure and I could--we could do pretty effective ambushes, I think." Kaminari nods, slowly.

"Man, I feel like I should be taking notes," he says, chuckling and rubbing at the back of his head. "Good luck either way, dude. We're gonna show 1-B who's boss," Kaminari says, giving Izuku a wink and a thumbs up. Izuku watches, blinking, as Kaminari turns and walks away, towards where Ashido and Sero are talking.

"Deku," Kacchan says, and it's with a scowl but no actual heat in the tone of his voice. Izuku looks at him, but Kacchan's nodding his head to Izuku's left. Izuku turns to see Neito approaching, wearing a suit with long tails and a number of watches dangling from the pockets of his suit pants. He has a lazy smirk on his face as he walks up to the two of them.

"Izuku, Blasty," Neito says, smiling slightly wider. "Are you ready for me to prove once and for all that 1-B is the superior class?" There's a glint in his eye, and between the curve of his lip and the wiggle of his eyebrows, Izuku can't help but snort, giggling under his breath.

"In your dreams, Copycat asshole," Kacchan says, folding his arms over his chest. "You know damn well you won't stand a chance if you're up against *me*," Kacchan says, tilting his head back and glaring at Neito through his eye mask. Neito just rolls his eyes.

"Blasty, the sports festival was *ages* ago," he says, shaking his head like he's talking to a particularly ill-behaved child. "Just because you beat me then doesn't mean you will now," he

says, rolling his eyes. Izuku blinks, and he's opening his mouth before he can think twice about it.

"You know, if the matches had been in a different order, Neito actually would have beat you, Kacchan," Izuku says, remembering the match where Neito had used Kacchan's quirk to his advantage. The two of them blink at Izuku, Neito's eyes widening and his smirk dropping into a surprised *o* while Kacchan's eyes narrow and his lips turn down in a scowl.

"How the fuck would you know that?" Kacchan growls, his voice quiet but still angry. "Actually, how the fuck did you use your quirk at the sports festival at all?" Kacchan's brows knit together. "I thought you had to be about to fucking kick it or something," he says. Izuku swallows, and he kind of wants to kick himself. *Why did I tell them that? Why couldn't I just keep my mouth shut?*

"I-I--" Izuku bites at his lower lip. "There's, um, a loophole. But with--with the sports festival, I guess I was getting hurt enough to--to make it activate?" he says, and he hates the way it comes out as a question, like he's genuinely not sure. Izuku watches Kacchan's eyes narrow further, watches Neito watching his friend's face.

"Whatever," Kacchan says after a moment, his eyes flickering to the board with the matchups. "It's time to fight," he says, his brows unfurling and his lips curling up into a smile. Izuku swallows, following Kacchan's gaze to the board. The matchups are all posted, but Izuku focuses on his own two fights.

I'm paired with Sero, Todoroki, and Jirou for the first match, Izuku notes, turning to see who he's up against. Izuku blinks when he sees that he's against Neito, but also Tsunotori, Tokage, and Kodai. Izuku wracks his brain, trying to remember their quirks. He can't remember them exactly, but he's pretty sure that all of them except for Neito are long-ranged fighters. He can't remember for sure about Kodai, but Tokage's quirk, letting her separate into pieces, and Tsunotori's horns are definitely going to be a challenge for him.

Izuku moves his eyes further down the board, pausing when he sees the next matchup with his name in it. Izuku's name is right above Tsuyu's, which doesn't surprise him, but below his name...

"Kendou and Yanagi?" Izuku murmurs, frowning. He looks to see who he's up against and he finds himself blinking. For the second match, Izuku is fighting against Kamakiri, Kuroiro, and two of his classmates. Izuku sees Shinsou and Ojio's names on the board, and he feels a sense of strange apprehension. He doesn't think he'd call it excitement, exactly, but it's better than the indifference Izuku felt before.

"Are you ready?" Neito asks, his voice quiet as he turns to look at Izuku. Izuku blinks, glancing at Neito. His friend has a small smile on his face, almost a smirk. Izuku swallows.

"I-I think so," Izuku says. He glances at the board again. "We're in the second fight," he says, seeing Neito nod out of the corner of his eye.

"You know I'm not going to hold back, right?" Neito asks, tipping his head to the side and narrowing his eyes, his smirk widening. Izuku blinks, then slowly raises an eyebrow, grinning at Neito.

"Why--why would you?" Izuku asks. "I'm going to give it my best, too." He closes one of his hands into a fist, holding it out at waist height. "You know that I'm not an easy opponent to fight," he says, meeting Neito's eyes. Neito raises an eyebrow, chuckling lightly.

"You'd better not use your quirk," Neito says, quietly enough that only Izuku will hear him. "I'll know." Izuku shakes his head, turning to watch as the classes start to shuffle away, into the

viewing area.

“I won’t need to,” he replies, turning on his heels and walking towards the viewing area. Izuku hears a surprised noise from Neito, then a series of quick footsteps following him.

“You’re not planning on it?” Neito asks, sounding surprised. Izuku shakes his head.

“No,” he says, swallowing. “I haven’t killed myself since...” Izuku breathes out, sliding his hands into the pockets of his pants. “It’s been a while,” he finishes, his mouth slightly dry. He sees Neito staring at him, his eyes widened slightly with shock. After a moment’s pause, Neito’s eyes soften, his mouth stretching into a smile.

“That’s... I’m glad, Izuku,” Neito says, reaching out and setting a hand gently on Izuku’s shoulder. Izuku shrugs, careful not to dislodge Neito’s hand. He can feel his face turning slightly red, but he tries to ignore it, tries not to flush any more than he already is.

“Oi!” Kacchan’s voice startles Izuku, and he turns around to see Kacchan watching him with narrowed red eyes. “I’m up first, Deku.” Kacchan grins, his lips curling up. “You’d better watch real fuckin’ close.” His grin grows into something sharp, something predatory. Izuku just smiles back at him, raising a hand in a small wave before turning to face forward again, walking alongside Neito.

“You too, Copycat!” Kacchan calls, and Neito raises a hand without even looking.

“Yeah, yeah,” Neito says, rolling his eyes. “I’ll be watching, Blasty,” he says, shaking his head. He glances at Izuku as they start up the stairs that lead to the elevated space above the training ground, a heated area with glass windows and televisions that let them watch the matches from multiple angles.

“Who’s--who’s Kacchan up against?” Izuku asks. He hadn’t really looked at the matches other than his own. Neito hums as they finish walking up the stairs, starting down the hallway. Izuku’s boots click on the tile, a slightly lower sound than the tapping of Neito’s shoes.

“Shouda, Tetsutetsu, Komori and Shiozaki,” Neito says. “No offence, but Blasty doesn’t have a chance.” Izuku frowns as they reach the viewing area, peering down into the mock-city below. Izuku can see Kaminari, Aoyama, and Tsuyu standing with Kacchan, seemingly talking. It looks like Tsuyu is leading the conversation, gesturing with gloved hands as the others watch. Izuku smiles, softly.

“I don’t know about that,” he says. Neito blinks, looking at him like he’s expecting Izuku to say more, but he doesn’t. Izuku watches the field as the two groups of students separate, each class moving to an opposite end of the city. Izuku sits down in a chair, Neito settling down beside him as the match begins.

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Watching Kacchan’s fight is a lot like watching a forest fire on the news. There’s a lot of smoke and fire and light, but there isn’t much else.

“I’d kind of expected it to be easier to see,” Izuku says, sighing as he leans forward in the chair. A few of the cameras are blocked by Komori’s mushrooms, and the corresponding television screens show some very pretty bright yellow mushrooms with delicate tops and bright white stalks, but nothing interesting about the fight. A couple other cameras simply aren’t in the area of the fighting--those are showing the cityscape, the deceptively bright blue sky that doesn’t show that

it's freezing cold outside, the insides of empty buildings. Izuku's been keeping an eye on one of the bird's eye view cameras, because if he watches that one, he can kind of actually see how the fight is moving, how it's shifting from place to place in the city. The camera where the actual fight is going on just shows smoke, from either Kacchan's quirk or from Kaminari or Aoyama burning away plant material.

"Yeah," Neito says, sighing as he leans back in his chair. "It has to be almost over with, right?" he asks it hopefully. Izuku has to agree with the sentiment. The match has been going on for almost twenty minutes, far longer than it should, if they're going to fit all of the matches in one afternoon.

"I guess that--that they haven't captured all four of either team, yet," Izuku says. He's not super hopeful that either side is close, either. He knows that Kacchan and Komori are still active by the blasts of sparking smoke and the blooms of mushrooms that block the cameras, and Aoyama's glittering light and Kaminari's bright electricity aren't exactly subtle, either. Izuku saw Shouda on camera not long ago, and he's pretty sure he saw a flash of Tsuyu's pink tongue on one of the cameras, but he's not sure. He knows, at least, that Shiozaki has been captured; there had been thick waves of vines rustling across the camera views every few moments in the beginning of the fight.

"The teachers are going to call it eventually," Neito says, sighing. "They can't keep going like this all day." He sounds confident, waving a hand at the glass window that shows the city before them, but Izuku isn't so sure. He thinks that Aizawa would probably rather spread the training out over a few more days than end a fight early.

"Look!" Uraraka shouts from another part of the room, pointing excitedly at a screen that had been previously covered by squat brown mushrooms. Izuku glances over, his eyes locking on the screen when he sees a boot crushing a stack of mushrooms. Izuku can hear wheezing over the speakers, whoever it is breathing loud and heavy.

"Looks like you're cornered now," a female voice says. Izuku can't see who's speaking, but when he glances over at Neito, he nods, not looking away from the screen.

"Komori," Neito says. Izuku nods, turning his eyes back to the screen. Izuku watches as the person stepping on the mushrooms goes flying back, away from the camera, but still within the view. It's Kaminari, his breathing coming quick and labored.

"His breathing," Izuku murmurs. Neito hums.

"Komori can grow mushrooms inside of people's lungs," Neito replies, and Izuku can't help but wince in sympathy for Kaminari. It wasn't mushrooms, but between sludge and flame, Izuku's had a few things that should be there in his lungs and throat.

"Oh?" Kaminari says, pausing to cough. "Where's the rest of your team, then?" He's got a wild grin on his face that's just barely visible with the angle of the camera.

"I don't need them for this," Komori says, smiling, and she raises a hand. Izuku tenses, leaning forward in his seat, but suddenly, a pink tongue enters the screen, wrapping around Komori's waist and tugging her away. There's a surprised look on her face, and Izuku just barely sees mushrooms starting to sprout from Tsuyu's tongue before the battle moves out of the view of the camera. Izuku sighs, about to say something to Neito about wishing he could see, but then Aizawa's voice comes on over the loudspeaker.

"Team Asui wins," Aizawa drawls, sounding bored. "All four of Team Shiozaki's members have been captured. We'll take a ten minute break to repair the field, and then we'll move on to the

second match.” He sighs into the mic, making a crackling sound that grates on Izuku’s ears.

“It was dumb luck, really,” Vlad King says, almost pouting. “I mean, really. They shouldn’t have been able to get Shiozaki like that.” Izuku hears a groan from behind him, probably from one of his classmates.

“You’re being biased,” Aizawa says, with a heavy sigh. “Having good luck doesn’t mean they didn’t win, anyway.” From beside Izuku, Neito chuckles softly under his breath.

“I guess we were both right,” Neito says, and Izuku blinks as he looks over to him.

“W-What?” Izuku asks, tilting his head to the side. Neito raises an eyebrow.

“They were both strong teams,” Neito says, his eyes shifting back to the view of the city below, where the two teams are shuffling out of the field, talking with their teammates. “That’s why it went on for so long.” Izuku nods, watching Kacchan snap something at Kaminari, who tips his head back and laughs brightly.

“It’s our turn, next,” Izuku says, quietly. He can see Neito nod out of his peripheral vision.

“Remember what we said,” Neito murmurs. “We won’t hold back just because we’re friends.” Izuku glances over to him, then leans to the side, elbowing him gently in the ribs.

“I’m not going to, Neito,” he says, laughing lightly and shaking his head. “I’m going to--I’m going to wipe the ground with--with you,” Izuku says, giving his best Kacchan impression, narrowing his eyes and pulling his lips up in a predatory grin. Neito seems to get it almost immediately, his eyebrows shooting up and one of his hands raising to smother his laugh.

“You--you can’t imitate him like that!” Neito chokes out, shaking his head and giggling. “God, Izuku, you should--you should do that as like, a side job,” he laughs. Izuku grins, and he puts on his best All Might expression.

Chapter End Notes

content warning: nothing i don't think?? wow this is wild

[discord!](#) [carrrd!](#)

i hope you enjoyed!!! i love reading the comments, they make me so happy :D i hope the matches with izuku (which will be the ones that are shown in detail!) are interesting matchups for you guys to read :D :D

in other news, today i had an absolutely delicious chai latte. idk why it was so good, it just was.

joint training arc, part 2

Chapter Summary

last time: izuku visits miura at her shop. then, the joint training starts.

Chapter Notes

this one feels like it sucks gamers i hate rewriting canon but also idk the last bit doesn't vibe with me

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Izuku takes a deep breath as he and Neito step off of the stairs, into the hallway that leads to the mock city. There's something amazing about seeing the city that, just moments ago, was destroyed, crumbling and busted in places. All it took was a few minutes and Cementoss's quirk, and it looks practically brand new.

"Have you--have you ever copied Cementoss's quirk?" Izuku asks, looking over to Neito. Neito glances at him through the sides of his eyes, raises an eyebrow.

"They aren't going to let me do it for the match, if that's what you're asking," Neito says. "I have. It's hard to use, and it comes with a mutation, so it's kind of difficult." Neito grimaces. "I don't like it. It feels... gritty."

"Does my quirk actually--does it hurt?" Izuku asks, suddenly remembering the way Neito had reacted that first time, when they'd been in the middle of the attack on the summer training camp. Neito shakes his head quickly.

"No, it doesn't," Neito says. His tips his head to the side, pressing a finger to his chin as they walk. "You know, I don't really know how to describe it. It's kind of like... like wearing a harness," he says, humming. Izuku frowns, feeling his brow furrow.

"That's--that's weird," Izuku says. "I don't feel anything like that."

"You wouldn't," Neito says, shrugging. "You'd have been feeling it since you were four or five." He pauses, glancing to Izuku as they reach the cityscape area. "It's like having a safety net," he says. "Like you're being held, or something, but... but on the inside." Izuku blinks.

"That's..." Izuku trails off. *It sounds nice*, he thinks to himself.

"We should go," Neito says, waving a hand at his team, who are already gathered together. Izuku glances around, seeing Todoroki and Jirou facing him, with Sero standing with his back to Izuku. Izuku nods, taking a step in their direction, but Neito sets a hand on his shoulder, stopping him.

"You'd better not have been lying," Neito says, barely above a whisper. "You don't get to hurt yourself because of a class exercise." Izuku turns to him, rolling his eyes.

"I'm not going to," Izuku says. "I'm going to--I'm going to beat you the first time, after all." Izuku watches Neito's eyes narrow, his smile widening slightly, before he releases Izuku and starts to walk away. Izuku takes a deep breath and walks over to his classmates.

It takes him a few steps to get there, but as he approaches, he sees Todoroki and Jirou perk up. Todoroki nods his head in Izuku's direction, saying something that Izuku can't quite make out, and Sero turns, too, giving Izuku a wave as Izuku stops beside him.

"Hey, man!" Sero says, setting a hand on Izuku's shoulder. "I was starting to wonder if you got lost." Izuku blinks, opening his mouth to reply, but Jirou speaks first, a teasing tone to her voice.

"Nah, he wasn't lost," she says, raising an eyebrow. "Just flirting with his boyfriend." Izuku blinks, feeling his face start to heat up, and he raises his hands in front of him.

"He's not--we're just friends!" Izuku says, shaking his head. From next to Jirou, Todoroki nods.

"Midoriya would tell me if he was dating someone," Todoroki says, firmly. He meets Izuku's eyes, and Izuku swallows, feeling vaguely like he's being tested, in some way. He nods, quickly, watching Todoroki's face relax slightly.

"Yeah, I'm--I'm way too busy for anything like that," Izuku says. Jirou rolls her eyes, a small smile on her face.

"Relax, I was just making fun of you," Jirou says. "We should come up with a plan for the fight, though, and you probably know the most about 1-B's quirks," she says, reaching up and twirling one of her earjacks around her finger. Izuku blinks, looking at his friends' faces to see they're all watching him.

"Oh, um," Izuku swallows, looking to the side. "I don't, actually. Not--not the ones we're up against. Neito's quirk is pretty straightforward. He can copy four quirks at a time for up to ten minutes, but he can only actually activate one at once," Izuku says. "I think Tsunotori can just shoot her horns? And Tokage can--she can separate herself into pieces. I don't remember, um, Kodai's quirk at all." Izuku swallows, looking up at his friends, but they don't look disappointed. Jirou is nodding, and Todoroki has a hand to his chin, looking thoughtful.

"Midoriya and Jirou are well suited to stealth," Todoroki says. "And Sero and I are both able to restrict the enemy's mobility." Izuku nods, watching as Jirou raises a finger, tilting her head to the side slightly.

"The other team has two long ranged fighters, if not three. Our only close ranged fighter is Midoriya, so if we use Sero's tape and Todoroki's ice to restrict the area that they can travel in, we can have Midoriya pick them off one by one, while Sero ties them up." Jirou nods looking thoughtful. "I would probably be best suited to stealth, like Midoriya said. I could use my heartbeat attack, but it would damage the city, and something tells me that's part of the grade, too."

"Smart," Sero says, nodding. "So, basically, we're trying to keep them from moving around too quickly, right? And we can pull them away one by one." Sero grins. "Well, we should pick what order we want to capture them in, right?"

"Monoma has to go first," Todoroki says. "He's by far the most versatile, meaning that he has the most potential to disrupt our plan." Izuku swallows, nodding.

"Neito is, um, he's best suited in mid to close range," Izuku adds in. "He's probably also warning his classmates about me, and he knows how I fight, and stuff." Izuku smiles, slightly. "He hasn't

sparred with me in a while, though, so it should be okay. He doesn't know all of my new tricks." Izuku grins.

"So, Monoma first," Sero says, bringing one hand to his chin. "I vote Tokage for the next priority. The body separating thing is pretty freaky, you know?" he says, and Izuku nods.

"I agree, but--but if we get a chance to capture one of them, we should take it regardless of the order," Izuku says. Jirou and Sero nod quickly.

"Yeah," Sero says. "For sure."

"Alright," Aizawa's voice says, coming over the speakers in the arena. "You guys need to head to the starting places. There's blue tape on them, but they're identical, so go to whichever one," he says, his voice strangely metallic over the speakers. Izuku looks to his group before starting off to their left. He leads them along the perimeter of the concrete city, headed towards the flash of blue he can see up ahead, glowing in the winter sun. Izuku feels a spark of something that he thinks might actually be excitement, and it brings a small smile to his face. *I want to see how much I've grown*, he thinks.

"Jirou, first you should figure out where they--where they are," Izuku says, casting a glance back over his shoulder. "Then Sero and Todoroki can go and try and split them up," he says, reiterating the plan from earlier. He waits until he sees all three of his teammates nod before he steps into the blue, taped-off square.

He can hear the footsteps of his classmates on the concrete as they file in behind him, and he reaches down to his belt, wrapping a hand over the hilt of a knife. It's one of his sharp ones, because he wouldn't be able to capture one of 1-B without something that could do damage, but he'd picked shorter knives, ones that would be easier to control. He doesn't need it yet, but it's comforting to feel the hilt in his hand, the cool metal leaching heat from his palm even through his gloves.

"Both teams are in position!" Vlad King says, his voice loud and cheerful over the microphone. "I'm gonna count down from three, and on go, you guys can get moving. 3, 2, 1, and... go!" Izuku moves quickly, darting out of the open space they're in and towards an alleyway between two tall buildings. He can feel his teammates following him as he tucks himself against the concrete, quickly examining the side of the building, with the open windows and the ledges. *I could climb this, my classmates probably couldn't, not without their quirks or some help.*

"Hear anything?" Sero asks, watching Jirou. She holds up a hand, her brows furrowing, and then she nods.

"They're moving into the city in groups of two," she says. "I'm not sure who is who, but one group is headed straight through the center, and another is going around the side." She pauses for a moment, biting at her lower lip. "The group on the perimeter sounds strange, like someone's floating or something. I think Tokage is in that group."

"I don't think Neito can copy her quirk," Izuku says, remembering a conversation from long, long ago. "If he's still separated when his time is up, it'd hurt him," he adds, explaining for his friends.

"We should go to the middle group, then," Todoroki says, and Izuku nods.

"You two go on ahead," he says, nodding to Todoroki and Sero. "Jirou and I will sneak up on them." He shoots a glance to Jirou, who nods. Izuku takes a deep breath as Sero shoots his tape, launching himself through the city, with Todoroki skating on silvery-blue ice behind him. Izuku

glances to Jirou, nodding.

Jirou starts moving, more carefully and quietly than Sero or Todoroki had. Izuku can't hear her footsteps at all, and he's impressed, even when her quirk surely helps her to practice moving silently. He moves behind her, reaching into his belt and unsheathing two knives as they snake through the city. The concrete casts cool blue shadows that overlap with one another, sharp lines of darkness that Izuku's only seen with the harsh winter sun. He lets Jirou take the lead, even though he could move faster over the top of the city; Jirou knows where their targets are, can hear what's happening ahead of them.

"We're close," she breathes after a moment. "It's Monoma and Tsunotori," she says. Izuku nods, following her as she slips into an alleyway.

"What's going on?" he asks, so quietly that he practically can't hear himself, knowing that Jirou's ears will make it out just fine.

"Sero's taping off the skies and Todoroki's icing the ground," Jirou says. "We should be good to go in a moment, but be careful of--" she stops suddenly. "Well. I guess you don't need to be careful of Monoma's copying." There's a trace of amusement in her voice, and Izuku smiles slightly. Most of his classmates still think he's quirkless, after all. *Not that it matters for this*, Izuku thinks. *I'm not going to need to reset, anyway.*

"I'll get Neito, then," Izuku says. "Are they done?" He sees Jirou nod.

"We should move forward a little bit more," she says, and she starts to move quietly through the streets again, leading Izuku on a twisting path. Izuku follows her, and as they move forward, he starts to hear the sounds of a fight, all sharp crackling ice and stretching, ripping tape. He can hear Neito's laughter and his voice, mixing with Tsunotori's.

"Doesn't really do you any good to trap us if you can't get close enough to hit now, does it?" Neito asks, his voice rising above the other sounds. Izuku grins, slipping closer through the buildings. He doesn't need Jirou to guide him anymore, not as he tucks one of his knives back into its sheath and pulls out a throwing knife, instead. He creeps forward until he's standing beside a chunk of blue, semi-transparent ice, the surface of it giving off a biting cold that sinks into his body even through his costume.

Izuku can see Neito and Tsunotori, both sporting horns on their foreheads, standing back-to-back in the center of the intersection. There's clear cellophane tape crisscrossing the skies and the windows of nearby buildings, with Sero standing on top of a roof of one of the buildings bordering the area, panting and rubbing at one of his elbow joints. The ground is coated in a thin layer of slick ice that grows thicker near the boundaries of the area, rising into swells of shoulder-high ice. Izuku is standing in front of the ice wall that's still growing, and he can't see Todoroki, but he knows the other boy must be close by the way the ice is still rising.

Izuku steps into a fighting stance, takes a moment to steady himself, and he aims. He throws one of his knives at Neito, at one of the long tails on his friend's coat. The knife soars through the air, landing neatly in Neito's coat and pinning it to a chunk of ice just behind him. Izuku grins as he sees Neito's smile drop and his blue eyes open wide in surprise as he yelps and tries to jump away from his own coat.

"Izuku!" Neito shouts, grabbing the knife and pulling it free from the ice. "I know that's you," he says, glancing around. He's looking in the correct general direction, but he doesn't seem to have spotted Izuku yet, so Izuku pulls another knife out of his belt. He can see Tsunotori, now separated from Neito, stalking around the edge of the clearing, probably looking for Todoroki. She's just

below the building Sero is crouched on top of.

Izuku throws one of his knives, this time backwards, and the hilt collides with the back of Tsunotori's head. She yelps, jumping about a foot in the air, and then there's a flurry of tape shooting down at her, wrapping around her arms. Izuku bites his lower lip, grabbing another, heavier throwing knife and repeating his earlier shot, trying to hit Tsunotori with the hilt. This throw isn't as neat, and it hits her in the temple. Izuku winces as he watches her go limp in Sero's tape as he hauls her up to the top of his building.

"Pony!" Neito shouts, sounding surprised, and Izuku watches as one of the horns on his head comes shooting off, firing upwards towards Sero. Sero dodges back just in time, though, out of Izuku's line of sight. Izuku hopes that Tsunotori is okay, but he doesn't have much time to dwell on it. Neito whips around, and this time, Izuku's sure that he sees him. They make eye contact, and Neito's blue eyes narrow as he grins.

"There you are," he says, and as one horn snaps back into place on his head, another comes shooting off. Izuku barely manages to duck down in time as the horn takes out a chunk of the ice wall that he's standing at, and then Neito is rushing towards him, judging by the sound of footsteps on ice. Izuku braces himself instead of rising off the ground, unsheathing two of his non-throwing knives in the few seconds that it takes for Neito to reach him. As Neito vaults over the ice wall, Izuku strikes out, one of his knives making contact with the front of Neito's thigh.

"Fuck," Neito curses, stopping and holding the bleeding gash on the outside of his left thigh as he skids to a stop about ten feet away from Izuku. "What, you're not going to use the hilt on me?" Neito asks. Izuku swallows, moving into a fighting stance and holding his knives up.

"We said not to--not to hold back, remember?" Izuku says, and any worry he'd felt dissolves when Neito grins, lifting his hand from the wound on his thigh and raising both fists into a fighting stance.

"I guess you won't mind if I don't pull my punches, then," Neito says, and he tilts his head forward. The two horns come shooting out of his forehead at lightning-fast speeds, and Izuku ducks out of the way, seeing Neito dart forward as he does. Izuku doesn't have anywhere to go, not with the ice wall still behind him, as Neito darts forward and lands an elbow strike in Izuku's ribs.

Izuku is used to being hit, though, so even with the bright burst of pain in his chest, he doesn't stop moving. Izuku twists forward, slicing matching diagonal cuts in the shape of an *x* in the front of Neito's chest, just deep enough to draw blood, before he ducks to the side and rolls away before Neito can use Tsunotori's quirk again. Izuku isn't sure where he's at with his ten minutes, but he knows that the horns are far more dangerous than a punch or a kick. Izuku hops to his feet a short distance away, just in time to see Todoroki step out from behind Neito. Izuku doesn't have any chance to react before Todoroki is extending a hand, summoning ice all around Neito's feet.

Neito tries to jump forward, out of the way of the ice, but all he manages to do is throw himself forward onto his hands and knees. The ice quickly spreads to wrap around his ankles and knees, fixing him to the ground. Neito hisses in frustration, pulling one of the horns off of his head and using it to chip at the ice as Todoroki steps around him, walking towards Izuku.

"That should be two down," Todoroki says, calmly. "Jirou said that Sero is dropping Tsunotori off and should be back soon." Izuku blinks.

"Is she--is Tsunotori okay?" Izuku asks. Todoroki tips his head to the side slightly.

"Recovery Girl is on standby," Todoroki says, like he's confused by the question. Izuku swallows,

giving himself a little shake as he looks back at Neito, who's still on the ground struggling against the ice. The wound on his thigh is bleeding, dropping circles of bright red blood on the crystalline ice, and Izuku winces. *Injuries like these never bothered me before*, he thinks, hoping it'll calm him down, but it doesn't. Izuku sees the bleeding gash on Neito's leg and all he can think about is how *dangerous* it would be if Neito couldn't get medical attention right away, if he had to sneak through the city at night, if he was in enemy territory.

"We should--we should wait for Sero to get back," Izuku says. "I'm not sure that I could--that I'm strong enough to restrain him myself, and we don't want him getting your quirk, T-Todoroki," Izuku says. Neito glances up at Izuku, his face twisted in frustration.

"You don't have me captured, not yet," Neito says, looking back down at the ice wrapped over his legs and slamming the horn down into it, hard. It looks like it's hurting his hand.

"Why don't you just knock him out?" Todoroki asks, tipping his head to the side. Izuku swallows, shaking his head.

"I don't--I don't want to hurt anyone more than necessary," Izuku says. Todoroki stares at him for a moment, then nods, slowly.

"I can't keep his legs frozen for too long, or he'll get frostbite," Todoroki says, looking down at Neito with a contemplative look on his face.

"Sero's on the way back," Jirou says from behind Izuku, startling him. He turns to see her walking up to them, her hands in her pockets. "We need to be careful, though. Kodai's quirk makes things larger, and she tried to drop a bunch of rocks on the two of us. We got out of the way, but it could be dangerous."

"Right," Izuku says, nodding. He glances down at Neito. "Neito, you should put pressure on that wound," he says, worrying at his lower lip. The wound is slick with dark blood, staining the dark fabric of Neito's costume even darker. Izuku can see Neito shivering, his face pale as he glares up at Izuku.

"We're on different teams, remember?" Neito says, scowling. Izuku swallows, opening his mouth to say something, but Neito moves one of his hands to press it against the wound, hissing as he does. Izuku feels a pang of guilt in his chest, fast and sharp, but he pushes it down as Jirou starts to speak.

"Sero's back," Jirou says, quietly. "But the other two from 1-B are following him. We need to get Monoma to the capture area before they have a chance to save him." Jirou's eyes move over to Izuku. "You should do it." Izuku blinks, shaking his head.

"I don't--I don't think I can restrain him on my own, and--" Izuku starts, but he's cut off by a long sigh from Jirou.

"Oh for fuck's sake," she says, before turning and marching up to Neito. She strikes him once, hard, on the back of the head, and he goes down like a sack of bricks. "Is that better?" Jirou asks, putting her hands on her hips. "Now go. You're the fastest." Izuku swallows, nodding. He moves forward, watching as Todoroki's ice fades away quickly, in a puff of thick steam. Todoroki nods from Neito's other side, and Izuku leans down, scooping Neito up in a fireman's carry.

"I'll be--I'll be right back," Izuku says, grimacing as he feels Neito's blood, slick and hot on his hand where he's holding his legs. Izuku doesn't wait for a response from the others before taking off, dashing through the city.

Izuku's shoes make soft slapping noises against the ground as he runs, speeding through the streets. Neito is heavy on his back, but he's not quite as heavy as Ren was, and Izuku is in far better shape than he had been the last time he's carried someone like this. Izuku swallows, feeling something bitter and sharp in his throat as he runs, muscles burning lightly in his legs. As Izuku turns around the corner, he feels Neito start to stir, his legs shifting slightly and the vibration of a groan in his chest. Izuku breathes out, slightly relieved. He shouldn't be this worried, he knows, but he can't help it. As much as he knows, logically, that it's just training, Izuku's been in too many life-threatening situations to see someone unconscious and *not* worry.

"Fuck," Neito mutters, his voice slightly slurred. Izuku tightens his hold on him, moving a little faster through the city. He shouldn't be far from the cage that they're supposed to put their captured opponents in, but he doesn't want Neito getting loose either way.

"Sorry," Izuku says, quietly. "We're almost there," he adds. Neito sighs, wriggling slightly, but not getting very far. Izuku has a firm grip on him, and he doesn't think that Neito would be able to get free unless he was at full strength. As it is, Izuku can feel Neito shivering, can feel the way he's weak as he struggles against Izuku's grip.

"Don't," Neito huffs out, going limp. "Don't apologize. You're supposed to do this. It's the whole point." He hisses out a breath of air, frustrated. "You're being nice to me because we're friends."

"I'm--no, I'm not," Izuku says, shaking his head just the tiniest bit. "I don't like hurting the--the good guys. It--it feels wrong," he says, his voice quiet. Neito hums under his breath.

"You're too nice," Neito says. "Right now, we're not supposed to be the good guys, you know." He sounds a little amused, almost. Izuku turns the corner and sees the cage, with Tsunotori inside of it. As Izuku approaches, she perks up, pressing up against the bars.

"Monoma!" she calls, leaning forward. "Are you okay?" Izuku swallows, looking up at her to see a fast-purpling bruise on the side of her head, where he'd hit her temple with the hilt of his knife.

"I'm fine," Neito calls back. As Izuku stops in front of the cage, he reaches out a hand and tugs open the handle, pulling the door open. He turns around, shrugging Neito off of his shoulders and lowering him carefully into the capture area. When his weight disappears from Izuku's shoulder, Izuku turns around to see Tsunotori helping Neito to sit against the side of the cage.

"Are you--are you okay, Tsunotori?" Izuku asks. She looks up at him, looking confused, and Izuku gestures to his own temple, trying to indicate the injury on her temple. Tsunotori blinks, then nods.

"Oh, yes! I'm fine," she says, smiling. "You are very kind, Midoriya." Tsunotori tips her head to the side slightly, before she turns back to Neito, looking him over once more before moving to sit at her own part of the capture area. Izuku swallows, meeting Neito's eyes before he turns. Neito's eyes are so, so blue, and he gives Izuku a small smile before Izuku turns, running out of the capture area and back into the city itself.

Izuku can hear the fighting before he's even close to where he'd left his teammates. There's the sound of shouting, high pitched and loud (Tokage? Kodai? Izuku doesn't know either of their voices) mixed with Sero's voice, lower in pitch but louder in volume. Izuku swallows, dipping his hands into the pockets of his belt and pulling out two of his knives.

"God damn," Sero says, his voice still distant as Izuku ducks behind a building, listening for a minute. "Todoroki, your left!" Izuku bites at his lower lip as he hears the sound of ice crackling sharply. He waits, listening, before he starts to scale the building, pulling himself up along the window sills and ledges. He tries to move quickly, grimacing as he hears a crash from the other

side of the building.

“Kodai!” Tokage (Izuku thinks, anyway) shouts, her voice high and alarmed. Izuku hears the sound of stretching tape as his fingers close over the edge of the roof, the concrete digging into the palms of his gloves as he pulls himself up. He scrambles forward, dragging himself with his elbows until his torso is flush against the cold concrete. As he crawls forward on his elbows and knees, moving to the other side of the rooftop, he can see the fight taking place below.

Kodai is standing in the middle of the street, her legs wrapped in ice up to her mid-calves. Todoroki is standing not far away, wisps of red-orange fire streaking through the air as he dodges Tokage’s fists, flying separate from her body. Sero is climbing out of a pile of rubble that appears to be made of enlarged pieces of smaller debris, a thin line of blood trickling down from his hairline and into one eye, which is squinted shut.. Izuku watches as Jirou slips out from behind a building, a stretch of Sero’s tape in her hands. She dashes forward, towards Kodai, wrapping the tape around the other girl’s arms and torso.

“Setsuna!” Kodai shouts, batting Jirou’s arms away. “I could use a hand!” she calls, looking back over her shoulder at her teammate. Izuku watches Tokage’s head swivel to look at Kodai, her eyes narrowing. Izuku grabs one of his knives, aiming and throwing just as a blur of movement shoots out from Tokage. He doesn’t see which of her body parts it is, but he hears the squelch as his knife slices right through it. Tokage hisses, her head and shoulders flinching where they float, as she turns to look up at Izuku.

“The other one’s back!” Tokage shouts, just as a swell of flame roars up behind her. Izuku watches as Todoroki’s flame wraps around her many floating parts and her shoulders, licking at her neck and cheeks. Izuku watches her mouth open, like she’s going to scream, before she drops to the ground, her eyes sliding shut.

“You’re last, Kodai,” Jirou says, and Izuku turns to watch her stretching the tape out, pinning Kodai’s arms to her sides. Kodai struggles against the tape, lunging forward and knocking her head against Jirou’s. Jirou falls to the ground on her butt, looking offended, but before Kodai can go anyway, Sero walks up to her, smirking as he rips a new length of tape from his elbow.

“Let’s just get this over with,” he says, reaching out and quickly wrapping the tape around Kodai. Kodai huffs, looking frustrated, but she doesn’t struggle again. Izuku watches, blinking.

“That went well,” Todoroki says, walking over to where Jirou and Sero are standing. “Do you think we should take them to the capture area, or--”

“1-A wins,” Aizawa says over the loudspeaker, cutting Todoroki off. “All members of Team Monoma are captured or unable to continue. Team Midoriya takes the match.” He sounds like he might be bored, maybe unsurprised. Izuku breathes out, crawling forward and to the edge of the building. Sero glances up at him, a bright grin on his face.

“Oh, hey! Do you want help getting down?” he asks, pointing an elbow up and shooting a line of tape out and onto the roof beside Izuku. Izuku blinks, reaching out and grabbing part of it. The other end breaks off from Sero’s elbow, falling to the ground. Izuku tugs at the part he’s holding, finding that it’s securely attached, like a rope. He looks down at Sero, smiling before he starts climbing down.

“Thanks,” he says, and he means it, but he doesn’t quite feel the excitement his classmates seem to. He can hear Sero whooping in excitement, can hear Jirou laughing, and when he glances down, he can even see Todoroki smiling. Izuku feels good that he won, sure, but it feels wrong, feels bitter as he looks down and sees Tokage, still unconscious on the ground. Izuku swallows and turns back to

the wall, focusing on climbing down the rest of the way.

He tries not to flinch when Sero claps a hand on his shoulder, tries to listen to what his friends are saying, but Izuku can't focus on the words, not really. All he can think about is the fact that, while he doesn't mind getting hurt, he's not so sure that he wants to hurt other good people, other students, other *kids*. Izuku works so hard to keep people safe, fighting the Gekkeiju so that Ren and Mouse could get out, going back so that he can save Haruta and Miura. Something about hurting other heroes in training feels like it's going against everything he's worked for.

Chapter End Notes

content warning: nothing they wouldn't put in canon tbh

[discord!](#) [carrd!](#)

i hope you enjoyed!!!! tell me how ur week is going so far (if you want)! mine is going pretty good, im ahead on homework for once and it's WEIRD

i want to get another cat and name him sasuke.....

joint training arc, part 3

Chapter Summary

last time: izuku slam dunks his opponents in his first match of the joint training!

Chapter Notes

hi gamers sorry this is late-ish i got distracted cooking :D

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Izuku watches as Recovery Girl tugs away at the fabric of Neito's pant leg, exposing the bloody wound underneath. It's largely stopped bleeding, but it's still large enough to make Izuku wince in sympathy. The entire cut is about the length of his hand, gaping open about two centimeters and filled with dark, clotted blood. Recovery Girl hums, reaching over to the rolling cart beside her and pulling off a square of sterile gauze. She wipes at the wound, clearing some of the blood away.

"This isn't too bad," she murmurs, then looks up at Neito's face. "Did you have a good breakfast and lunch today, young man?" she asks, her voice almost stern. Neito nods.

"And I slept well last night," he adds. Recovery Girl smiles, reaching up a hand and ruffling his hair.

"That's what I like to hear," she says, before leaning to the side and grabbing a packet of butterfly bandages. "I'll close it so it heals better, but I should be able to heal you all the way," she says, her eyes moving over to Izuku. "You should get your friend here to take better care of himself," she says. "Young Midoriya never sleeps quite enough, hm?" She shakes her head slightly as she starts to bandage the wound shut. Neito shakes his head, chuckling.

"Yeah, well, I'll try my best," Neito says. He glances up at Izuku. "He doesn't make it easy," Neito adds, giving Izuku a lazy smile. Izuku huffs out a breath.

"I-I sleep plenty," Izuku says, even though he definitely doesn't. "Is--is it going to scar?" he asks Recovery Girl, turning his gaze down to where she's pressing down the last butterfly stitch.

"Mm, no," she says. "It shouldn't." She pulls back, rolling a few feet back in her rolly chair to drop the packaging from the stitches into a small, metal garbage can. Izuku watches the pieces of paper flutter down, out of sight.

"I told you, Izuku," Neito says, sighing and rolling his eyes. "It's part of training. I'm *fine*." He sounds exasperated, almost frustrated. Izuku bites at his low lip, glancing down at the taped-shut wound on Neito's thigh. *It almost looks like my self-harm has before*, he thinks, before pushing the thought out of his mind.

"I know," Izuku says as Recovery Girl leans forward, planting a kiss on Neito's forehead. "It's just--I don't have to like it," Izuku says. Neito sighs.

“Is it because it’s me? Be honest,” Neito says, his blue eyes sharp as they meet Izuku’s. “I’m not fragile, you know.” Izuku blinks, feeling his brows furrow.

“It’s--it’s not because it’s you,” Izuku says. “I was worried about--about Tsunotori too, but I don’t know her well enough to just sit with her like I can with you.” He feels something bubble up in his chest, sharp frustration that prickles at his throat. Izuku swallows, picking at the ends of his sleeves. “Why aren’t you bothered by it?” Izuku asks, quietly. “Why isn’t--why does nobody else seem to care when they have to hurt each other?” Izuku hears a soft sigh, and it’s Recovery Girl who answers him.

“You’ve been through so much for someone so young,” she says, her voice a low murmur. She looks over at Izuku, something searching in her gaze. “When you train, your friends aren’t looking to seriously hurt you. The teachers and staff won’t let anything happen to you, or to any of the students,” she says, folding her arms over her chest. “Beating yourself up over every bruise and scrape you give your friends isn’t going to do anything but make you miserable.”

Izuku swallows, nodding as he looks down at his lap. He feels a swell of something rising up in his chest, and he isn’t what it is, exactly, but he knows that he doesn’t like it. It feels wrong in his body, so he doesn’t move an inch, staring at his legs, at the black fabric covering them. He breathes in, out.

“Izuku?” Neito asks, his voice quiet. “Are you okay?” Izuku swallows, before looking up at his friend to see his blue eyes narrowed ever-so-slightly, his lips turned down slightly in concern. Izuku bites at his lower lip, shakes his head.

“I’m--I’m fine,” he says, sighing as he looks at Neito’s thigh, where Recovery Girl is pulling the sticky stitches off of the healed skin. There isn’t a trace of the injury.

“There isn’t even a scar, see,” Neito says, waving a hand at it. “It’s just training.”

“I know,” Izuku murmurs. “It’s still--I still don’t like it.” Neito nods, something thoughtful in his gaze.

“You don’t have to like it,” Neito says. “Just... don’t stress yourself out over it,” he says, pressing his lips together. “I don’t think it’s good for you.” Izuku breathes out, something like a sigh but quieter, less obvious, but he nods.

“I’ll try,” Izuku says in reply. He reaches out, on an impulse, grabbing Neito’s wrist. Neito blinks, lifting his hand and letting Izuku take his arm, letting Izuku press his fingers into Neito’s pulse point. He can feel Neito’s heart beating through the skin, can feel the blood moving, smooth and even and strong. Izuku breathes out, releasing Neito’s arm. He feels something uncoil in his chest, feels himself relax slightly.

“You’ve seen way too much death,” Neito says, watching Izuku with a furrowed brow. Izuku can’t do anything but nod.

“Nobody is going to die in training,” Recovery Girl says, firmly. “Midoriya, are you still seeing Hound Dog?” she asks, her gaze sharp and knowing. Izuku swallows.

“I’ve been--I’ve been kind of busy lately,” he says, his voice cracking. From the way Recovery Girl clicks her tongue, he can tell she doesn’t think it’s a very good excuse.

“Well, I’ll talk with Aizawa, get an appointment scheduled for you if you’d like that,” she says, turning to the cart and rummaging around before producing two packets of fruit gummies. “Here

you go,” she says, handing one packet to Neito and the other to Izuku. “Now, eat up.”

Izuku blinks. “You didn’t heal me, though,” he says feeling confused. Recovery Girl arches an eyebrow at him.

“You used up plenty of energy fighting, I’m sure,” she says, watching him. “What do you say about Hound Dog, hm?” Izuku swallows, and when he glances at Neito, his friend gives him a reassuring nod.

“Um, maybe,” Izuku says, looking down at his lap. “You can--you can ask Aizawa-sensei when I’m free.” Izuku isn’t sure he *has* the time, but... it couldn’t hurt to ask, right? He watches Recovery Girl nod approvingly.

“I’ll do that, then,” she says. “Well, the two of you better get back to training,” she says, making a shooing motion with her hands. “Try and be careful, now,” she says, her eyes catching on Izuku. Izuku swallows, then nods as he and Neito stand.

“See you later, Recovery Girl,” Neito says, lightheartedly as he raises a hand to wave goodbye to her. She huffs out a sigh.

“I certainly hope not. Don’t go getting injured if you have any other options,” she says, turning to tidy up the cart. Izuku watches Neito smile as he turns, walking out the door. Izuku pauses for just a moment, before he follows after him, headed back to the viewing area to await his next fight.

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It isn’t long before Izuku is stepping back out into the arena, fidgeting nervously with his hands as he makes his way over to where Tsuyu is standing. As he approaches, he can see her shivering even through her thick winter costume, and he can’t help but feel a little bad for her. For all of the trouble Izuku’s quirk gives him, at the very least, it doesn’t seem to make him weak to a whole *season*.

“Are you nervous, Midoriya?” Tsuyu asks, tipping her head to the side slightly. “I know I am, ribbit.” Izuku swallows, giving her a small smile.

“Y-Yeah,” Izuku says, nodding. “I’m, um, I’m a little nervous about fighting Shinsou, to be honest.” Tsuyu stares at him for a long moment.

“Because of his quirk?” she asks, slowly, like she’s confused, and Izuku blinks, shaking his head.

“Oh, n-no! Just because, um, we’ve trained together so much, so he--he knows most of my tricks,” Izuku explains. He feels a wash of heat go over his face at the thought of Tsuyu thinking he was judging Shinsou for his quirk, that he was scared of a quirk that, for all intents and purposes, felt a lot like being half asleep. Izuku knows from experience that there are far, *far* more painful quirks out there.

Tsuyu nods. “Makes sense, ribbit,” she says. “I think we’ll do fine,” she says, her gaze shifting to look behind Izuku. “Kendou, Yanagi. It’s good to see you two again.” Izuku blinks, turning around to see the two girls approaching. Kendou raises a hand in greeting, her long orange hair pulled back in a ponytail. Yanagi hovers behind her, her hands twisted together in front of her. It’s a motion Izuku himself has done many, many times, and he wonders if it’s just a habit, or if Yanagi is nervous.

“Hey, Asui, Midoriya,” Kendou says, smiling. How have you two been?” Izuku smiles, feeling awkward, and he’s grateful when Tsuyu smiles at Kendou.

“I told you, you can call me Tsuyu, ribbit. I’ve been doing well,” she says, her tone friendly. “How about you two?”

Kendou nods. “All’s well over in 1-B,” she says, grinning. “We should probably come up with a plan, huh?” she says. Her eyes move over to Izuku. “Monoma says you’re pretty close with Shinsou,” she says, and Izuku swallows before nodding, hesitantly.

“Y-Yeah, we train together,” Izuku says. Kendou nods.

“Kamakiri and Kuroiro are pretty tough to beat on their own, so we’ve got our work cut out for us,” Kendou says, her lips twisting into a slight frown. “Kuroiro can move through anything dark, so you’ll want to keep an eye on shadows and stuff. Kamakiri can make blades at will, and they’re sharper and stronger than normal metal,” Kendou says. Izuku blinks, reaching down to feel at the knives on his belt.

“Do you know, um, how they hold up to normal knives? The kind for fighting,” Izuku says, and Kendou pauses, biting at her lower lip.

“I have no idea, to be honest,” she says. “Sorry.” Izuku shrugs, swallowing.

“It’s fine,” he says. He takes a small breath. “Shinsou’s quirk requires a verbal response to a question, and it can be broken with physical pain or impact,” he says, glancing between Kendou and Yanagi. “Ojiro is really good with martial arts, and his tail, um, it’s stronger than his arms or legs,” he says. Kendou nods, clenching one of her hands into a fist. It grows, swelling into about the size of her head.

“So I’ll be a good match for Kuroiro or Ojiro, sounds like,” she says. “In unarmed hand-to-hand, I can usually beat people.” She glances to Yanagi. “Reiko, you can control most of Kamakiri’s blades, right?”

Yanagi nods, looking down at the ground. “Most of them,” she says, her voice quiet and monotone. “His biggest ones are too much for me.” Kendou nods, looking back at Tsuyu and Izuku.

“Reiko has telekinesis,” Kendou says. “So we should probably have her and Midoriya team up to deal with Kamakiri. Other than that match up, I’m not sure there’s any need to have a specific grouping.”

“Works for me, ribbit,” Tsuyu says, nodding. “As long as we’re all careful about responding to Shinsou and keeping our eyes on dark places, we should do well.” Her eyes move over the group, and Izuku is suddenly reminded that she was part of the group that helped raid the Shie Hassaikai, that she’s been on the field in a real battle. Izuku wonders if she *gets* it, if she feels the same sense of ever-lingering dread that never leaves, the guilt over every decision, the nerves at every moment of silence. Izuku really hopes that isn’t just him.

“It’s time to get started,” Aizawa’s voice says over the loudspeaker. “You all know the drill by now. Head to one of the taped off areas and wait for the countdown.” He sounds tired, but Izuku knows that his teacher is paying full attention. He’s been around Aizawa enough to know that, while his teacher really is exhausted, the disinterest and the boredom are an act more than anything.

Izuku follows after Kendou and Tsuyu as they start forward, towards the right-side starting area. It’s opposite from the one that Izuku started in the last time, and the city looks different, from this angle. Izuku supposes it could be because the city’s been rebuilt before, too, but the buildings seem smaller, seem to be built easier to climb. After squinting up at the concrete, painted in sharp grey shadows and golden highlights where the late afternoon sun strikes the freshly built structures,

Izuku decides that he's imagining it. These look identical to what Cementoss has built before, after all.

"Reiko and Midoriya, you two stick together," Kendou says as they step into the starting area, turning her head back to look over her shoulder. The sunshine, slanted and golden, makes her orange hair look like it's on fire, glowing like fine strands of amber. Izuku nods, sliding a hand down to rest on his sheathed knives, the two largest he has with him. He hopes that they're enough to stop Kamakiri's blades, because if they *aren't*, Izuku can't do anything about the other boy's quirk.

"Alright, count of three," Aizawa's voice says, droning over the loudspeaker. "Three, two, one," he says, quickly and unceremoniously. After a moment's pause, he adds, "Go," like he'd forgotten. Izuku resists the urge to grin as he and Yanagi dart out of the taped off area, moving to the side.

"Shinsou is going to try to find us," Izuku says. "He can't really use his quirk unless he's within speaking distance, so we need to keep our guard up for that." Izuku casts a gaze back at Yanagi, who nods.

"I'm most effective if we're near rubble," Yanagi says. "I can only move objects that weigh as much as I do or less." Her voice is that same calm monotone from before, and it almost reminds Izuku of Shinsou. The difference is, Shinsou's voice is dry with sarcasm, monotone out of disinterest. Izuku isn't sure, but he thinks this might just be how Yanagi talks.

"Okay," Izuku says, glancing around. "I think there should be an--an area with some tables and chairs," he says, turning a corner. He breathes out a sigh of satisfaction as he spots the mock tables and chairs, made of concrete about two blocks ahead of them. He glances over to Yanagi, who nods, her grey hair swishing around her face.

"They'll be fragile," she notes, but she doesn't sound disappointed. It takes Izuku a moment, before he puts it together.

"Oh, if the tables are too heavy, you can smash them with--with the chairs, right?" he asks, watching her as they jog forward. She doesn't reply except to nod her gaze locked ahead of her.

They run for a few more seconds, their shoes slapping against the concrete and echoing through the fake city. The thing with the concrete structures, huge and strong as they are, is there's nothing to muffle noise, nothing to absorb it like in a real city. Everything seems to echo twice as loud as it would, although Izuku thinks that at least part of that is the fact that there aren't any other sounds to cover anything up.

It's probably because of the strange lack of sound in the mock city that Izuku hears the sounds of footsteps so early. He skids to a stop, not far from the tables and chairs that Yanagi should be able to use, raising a hand to alert Yanagi that there's something wrong. She nods, slipping into a fighting stance and holding a hand out behind her. Izuku wonders briefly if she needs hand motions to operate her quirk, but he pushes the thought out of his mind and focuses, listening.

He hears a single pair of footsteps, moving smoothly, like the person is walking quickly rather than jogging or running. He doesn't think it could be Kuroiro--there's no reason for him to walk towards them, not with the shadows cast by the buildings around them, ink-black and stretching across the concrete ground. Izuku braces, setting a hand on one of the knives in his pockets, before he hears Tsuyu's voice.

"Midoriya?" Tsuyu says, her voice a croak. Izuku blinks, confused.

“Tsuyu? Why are you--” Izuku starts, before he feels a wash of something cool and foggy. It’s familiar and *comforting* --Izuku knows this feeling, and that’s why he isn’t surprised when Shinsou steps out of the shadows, the bright sunlight streaking across his face and making dark shadows in the shaded places. The mask that covers his mouth is something that Izuku’s seen before, but he hadn’t realized that it did anything other than conceal when Shinsou speaks. Izuku feels a pang of terror and realization flash in his chest. *He changed his voice* , Izuku realizes. *I had no idea he could do that.*

“That was easier than I thought,” Shinsou says, his hands in his pockets. His hero uniform looks a lot like Aizawa’s, only the fabric is a cool grey and it’s slightly more form fitting than their teacher’s. The white capture scarf wrapped around his neck flutters slightly as a breeze kicks up through the area. Shinsou tilts his head to the side, his eyes narrowing slightly at Izuku, and Izuku’s *sure* he’s about to speak.

Suddenly, Izuku feels a firm shove at his side, pushing him hard enough that he has to stumble to keep his balance. It feels like something fine and thin cracks, and Izuku blinks as he regains control of himself. It takes Izuku a second to gather himself, to feel steady again, and in that time, Yanagi throws one of her hands forward and a chair scrapes against the ground before it launches across the space, towards Shinsou.

“You’ll have to do better than that,” Shinsou says as he dodges out of the way of it neatly. It crashes to the ground, breaking into three pieces as concrete dust rises up around it.

Yanagi doesn’t respond, instead raising her hands. A chair shudders for a minute before rising up into the air, floating above Shinsou. Shinsou steps back, his brows furrowing slightly.

Izuku doesn’t waste his chance, instead dipping his hand into his belt and pulling free two of his knives. He darts forward, throwing one of them out at Shinsou, aiming for Shinsou’s leg. Izuku finds himself hoping that Shinsou will dodge, even as he sees Shinsou reacting too slowly, stepping to the side in time to avoid the knife sticking straight into his calf, but not fast enough to avoid the blade slicing through the meat on the side of Shinsou’s calf. Shinsou grunts, ducking back into the darkness of the alleyway.

Even though he’s in that dark, Izuku can see him, now that he knows where to look. Shinsou crouches down, his hair nearly grey from the shade. He reaches up a hand, grabbing at the capture scarf. Izuku slides back, grabbing at another knife so that he’s armed in both hands.

“Watch out for the scarf,” Izuku says under his breath, and then he’s rushing forward, running at Shinsou. He moves quickly, slashing out at the capture scarf as it snakes over to him. The carbon-fiber fabric cuts like paper under his blades, and it only takes Izuku a moment to get over to Shinsou, watching his violet eyes open wide with surprise as Izuku slides into his space, striking out with the back of his knife, with the hilt of the blade.

Shinsou catches his arm with one hand, hissing and gritting his teeth. Izuku can see his mouth from this close, can see the muscles clenched around his jaw. Izuku steps forward, pushing Shinsou back towards the wall.

“Fuck,” Shinsou says, gasping as Izuku moves forward, stabbing the hilt of his knife into Shinsou’s stomach. Izuku grimaces, hating the sound of pain that Shinsou makes, but he knows that it’s better than having stabbed him with the blade itself. Izuku dodges easily out of the way of Shinsou’s knee strike, using the movement to knock his elbow forward, into Shinsou’s mask.

Izuku’s struck by how *easy* it is, to fight Shinsou. It’s not that Shinsou’s bad at fighting, either-- Shinsou’s better than most of the class would be without their quirks. Izuku had just forgotten, he

thinks, what it was like to really fight against someone who wasn't trying to kill him, someone who didn't think of him as less than the ground beneath their feet. Izuku thinks that fighting Shinsou is easier than just *talking* to Sasaki, in many ways.

"Is this what you've been doing in secret?" Shinsou asks, his voice cutting, sharp. "Getting special training on how to fight?" Shinsou throws a quick punch, but Izuku dodges it just enough so that it grazes his cheek instead of hitting him square in the eye. Izuku grits his teeth, willing himself not to answer as Shinsou scowls at him. Izuku lashes out with a fist, aiming at Shinsou's temple, but Shinsou dodges, jerking his head to the side.

"I knew that you and the second years would discard me eventually," Shinsou hisses, leaning forward. Izuku can feel his breath on his face. "I just didn't think that Aizawa would let you do it so soon."

Izuku has to bite his lip to stop himself from replying, to stop himself from telling Shinsou that that's not true, that he wouldn't hurt him like that, that he wouldn't throw him away. Izuku slides back, away from Shinsou, even though he knows that it'd be better for him to keep fighting, knows he'd have a better chance at winning if he stayed close. Izuku grits his teeth at the expression of pain on Shinsou's face, and maybe that's why he's too startled to move when he sees it shift into a smirk.

"Good job, Shinsou," a voice says from behind Izuku, and that's all the warning he gets before he hears the sound of something slashing sharply through the air, making a sound like whistling through the leaves of a tree. Izuku moves backwards on reflex, sliding quickly across the ground before pain erupts in his midsection.

Izuku gasps as he feels the blade slide through his side, cutting sharply through the muscle and fat there. Izuku grits his teeth, pressing his hand to the wound and feeling the quick flow of blood rushing out of the wound, spilling out over his fingers and splattering onto the ground. Izuku grits his teeth, hissing as he steps back and slips into a fighting stance.

"You should surrender, Midoriya," Kamakiri says, the bug-like mouthparts around his face glinting in the dim light of the shallow alleyway. "That wound looks pretty bad." He's wielding two long, thin blades, each as long as his entire body. They curve neatly, looking thin enough to be foil, and they glitter like cut glass. Izuku grimaces, moving away from them further.

"Midoriya!" Kendou's voice calls out, from off to the side, but Izuku doesn't dare respond, not until he can be sure that it's her. He hears panting, sees her skid into his view just beyond the alleyway, in the bright sun.

"Itsuka, Shinsou is here, and he can change his voice to sound like others," Yanagi says, her lips pressed in a thin, nervous line. Izuku feels dizzy. He glances down, at his wound, and suddenly, this doesn't feel like training anymore. Izuku sees the bloody wound in his gut, close to where he'd been shot, hears the sounds of concerns and panic from Kendou and Yanagi, and this all feels far too real. Izuku holds his knives out, and he takes a deep, slow breath.

Izuku darts forward, sliding between Kamakiri's blades. Kamakiri's eyes widen, slightly, but he doesn't react fast enough to get away from Izuku. Izuku darts forward, tucking one knife between himself and Kamakiri and slamming the other, hilt-first, into Kamakiri's jaw. The blade between him and Kamakiri blocks the blade that comes out from Kamakiri's chest, but it doesn't really matter, anyway. It's only a moment before Kamakiri is dropping to the ground in a heap, his blades clattering to the floor beside him.

Izuku turns to see Shinsou, staring at him with wide, startled eyes. Izuku knows that there's a feral

look on his face, that his lips are pulled back in a snarl and that his eyes are wide, desperate. Izuku doesn't care. He ducks forward, at Shinsou, and the boy steps back, his back colliding with the wall. Izuku slams himself into Shinsou, pressing the edge of the clasp to his throat.

"Midoriya?" Shinsou croaks out, the whites of his eyes huge. He's shaking where Izuku has the blade pressed to his pulse point, but Izuku can't figure out why for the life of him. All he can feel is the steady thrum of adrenaline in his veins, the too-fast pounding of his heart. Izuku feels like he's going to pass out, like he's both here and not at all, like he's staring into golden eyes or asleep in bed, thrashing in the sheets.

Izuku breathes a shaky breath. His hands are shaking, hard, so hard that he's sure that it's jostling the blade where it's held against Shinsou's neck, but he can't move, can't release Shinsou. All that he can think about is the wound in his side, hot and pulsing with each heartbeat, prickling and aching.

"Midoriya, let us tie him up," Kendou's voice says from behind him, something hesitant in her voice. "You're... you've got him, so just let us tie him up," she says.

Izuku shakes his head, but he can't speak. He can't move, and he can't release Shinsou. He doesn't know what's wrong with him, what this coiled-up, wound-tight feeling is in his body, but he can't move. Izuku feels his teeth start to chatter in his mouth, but it doesn't feel like him. He wonders, briefly, if he's under the effects of someone's quirk.

"Midoriya, you're hurting me," Shinsou says, his voice barely a whisper. "Can you... can you please let me go?" he asks, his voice cracking and his breaths coming uneven, shaky. Izuku swallows. He feels like he's about to pass out, like he's losing too much blood. Judging by the wet feeling down his shirt and legs, soaking into his shoes, Izuku thinks that he just might be.

"H-Help," Izuku says, staring Shinsou dead in the eyes, feeling himself shake, hard. There's only a moment before he feels Shinsou's quirk wash over him, a soothing feeling. He feels his body go limp, feels his hands fall to his sides.

"Drop the knives," Shinsou says, his voice still shaky. Izuku's body loosens his grip on his knives, and they clatter to the floor. Shinsou swallows visible, the bobbing of his throat moving the thin cut on his throat. Izuku wants to scream, wants to dig his fingers into his own flesh, wants to hurt himself. He doesn't know why he'd reacted that way, doesn't know why he'd been so *scared*. He watches Shinsou's brows drop, watches Shinsou's eyes move to his wound.

"I've got him," Kendou says, and Izuku feels a hand on his shoulder. He'd flinch, if he wasn't under the effects of Shinsou's quirk. Instead, he just feels a distant, foggy pang of fear.

"Sleep," Shinsou says, his voice soft, and the world melts away. Izuku vaguely feels someone catching him as he drifts into nothingness.

--

Izuku wakes up in the infirmary. His eyes shoot open, staring up at the ceiling, and there isn't a moment of being confused, of not knowing what's going on. There isn't a moment of Izuku wondering why he's here, what happened. Izuku blinks once at the ceiling, before he sits bold upright, gasping and clutching at his side. There's a thick swath of bandages wrapped there, but Izuku doesn't feel the telltale burn of pain that should be there. Izuku sucks in a breath, squeezing his eyes shut and shivers. He wishes he *was* hurt, wishes that they hadn't healed him. He should be hurting right now, after what he did to Shinsou.

“Midoriya,” Shinsou says, his voice startling Izuku enough that Izuku almost jumps, his heart pounding in his chest. He turns to the side to see Shinsou sitting beside his bed, his arms folded over his chest. Izuku swallows thickly. There’s no mark on Shinsou’s neck, not even a scratch.

“Shinsou, I--” Izuku starts, but he stops, staring at Shinsou. He blinks, shaking his head. Shinsou sighs, blowing out a heavy breath of air.

“Your team won,” Shinsou says. “Kendou and Yanagi got me just fine after you were knocked out, and they had Tsuyu waiting at the capture area. They got Kuroiro and Ojiro when they came to get you and capture you,” he says, shifting slightly in the seat. His eyes never leave Izuku’s face.

“I-I could have--I almost--” Izuku stammers, feeling his heart beating, feeling his chest ache. He tries to suck in a breath, but he can’t, even as he reaches a hand up and twists his fingers in the fabric of the hospital gown he’s wearing.

“You didn’t do anything wrong,” Shinsou says, his voice low. “It was a perfectly valid strategy to make me surrender.” He pauses, and Izuku has to listen to his own uneven gasps in the space. Shinsou blows out air sharply, through his nose. “Jesus, Midoriya, breathe,” he says, sharply. Izuku struggles to comply, his voice coming in small, wheezing gasps.

“C-Can’t--” Izuku starts, before he feels the grip of Shinsou’s quirk. He doesn’t have time to adjust to it, though, because Shinsou’s already hissing an order before Izuku can fully register the grip of the quirk on him.

“Breathe, Midoriya,” Shinsou says, sharply. “And calm down.” The relief is immediate. Izuku feels the tension bleed out of his body, feels his head clear as he sucks in a full, deep breath. A few moments pass where Izuku just sits there, breathing in and out, slow and measured, before Izuku feels the quirk fall away, letting Izuku go.

“T-Thanks,” Izuku murmurs, shutting his eyes for a moment. “I still shouldn’t have--I shouldn’t have threatened you like that,” Izuku says. He hears a heavy sigh from Shinsou, and when he looks up, the boy is staring up at the ceiling.

“You didn’t do anything wrong,” Shinsou says, slowly like he’s talking to a child. “The only reason it was an issue is that you had a panic attack or something.” He looks down at Izuku, his lips turning up in something between a grimace and a smirk. “If you were in trouble, wouldn’t Aizawa be down here, anyway?” he asks, arching an eyebrow. Izuku blinks, before making himself take another deep breath.

“Yeah,” Izuku says, reaching forward and grabbing the infirmary blanket, wrapping his hands in it and focusing on the grounding sensation of the fabric between his hands. Shinsou grunts, and Izuku looks up when he hears the sound of a chair scraping against the ground.

“Your mom and Recovery Girl said you’re fine to go back to watching whenever you’re awake,” Shinsou says, turning and walking towards the door. “So get changed and come watch the rest of the fights. There’s still a couple left,” he says, grabbing the handle of the door. Izuku hears it click, but just as Shinsou is pushing the door open and stepping out into the hallway, he turns, looking over his shoulder at Izuku.

“You didn’t hurt me,” Shinsou says. “It’s just training, Midoriya. You didn’t hurt me,” he says again. He pauses there for a moment, his eyes locked on Izuku’s before he turns, walking out of the room and shutting the door behind himself.

Izuku twists his hands in the blankets. He shuts his eyes and counts his heartbeat where it pounds

in his ears. He might not have hurt Shinsou yet, but he knows beyond a shadow of a doubt that by the time the winter break starts, he *will* .

Chapter End Notes

content warning: panic attacks, PTSD shit, mild medical stuff

[discord!](#) [carrrd!](#)

i hope you enjoyed!!!! i have had a very poggers day but i also did zero homework so i will be regretting that very very soon

soothe

Chapter Summary

last time: izuku has a ptsd moment during the fight (uh oh!) but shinsou isn't mad at him

Chapter Notes

hi sorry this one is short i had to write like 3500 words of assignments today on top of this chapter so i simply do not have the brain juice to write another 500-600 words to make this the usual length (dabs)

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Izuku feels like he's walking into class late when he finally manages to drag himself out of the infirmary, wearing his school uniform over the bandages on his side. He'd peeled them up just enough to see that the slice in his side has been reduced to a nasty bruise with a thin, shallow cut on top, but Izuku figures that if Recovery Girl had put a bandage there, he probably should leave it on. It feels uncomfortably bulky under his uniform, and thinks idly that he'll need to get a bigger size for after winter break. He's put on so much muscle since the start of the school year that it's almost unbelievable.

"Hey, Midoriya, welcome back!" Sero's voice is a relief to hear when Izuku steps up that last stair, into the viewing area. Sero raises an arm, waving at him. "You got all fixed up? That looked like a pretty nasty cut," he says, his eyes dropping to Izuku's side. Izuku swallows, raising one hand and pressing it over the spot where the bandages lay under his clothes.

"It's just--just a small scrape, now," Izuku says, giving Sero a weak smile. Sero nods, still smiling wide, and it makes Izuku feel a little less like the freak who'd panicked and held a knife to his friend's throat. Izuku walks over to where he'd been sitting before, next to Neito. On the other side of his seat, Kacchan is sitting, his red eyes sharp and his arms crossed over his chest. Both he and Neito have unusually serious expressions, both of their lips turned down in slight frowns. Izuku wonders if they might be distantly related, then pushes the thought out of his head. Aside from the blonde hair and their paler skin, they look nothing alike, really.

"Izuku, are you okay?" Neito asks, his brows pulling together slightly as he looks Izuku up and down, clearly taking in the thin sheen of sweat on Izuku's forehead and upper lip, the way Izuku's hands are still shaking slightly. "Recovery Girl wouldn't let us back to see you," Neito says, his lips twisting into a scowl. Izuku blinks.

"Why--Why not?" Izuku asks, tipping his head to the side slightly, feeling his brows furrow. "I wasn't--I wasn't all that injured," he says. Kacchan huffs out a breath.

"Something about not missing our next fucking match and about you needing some damn space," Kacchan grumbles, uncharacteristically quiet. Izuku blinks, swallowing.

“Um, how did--how did your second matches go?” Izuku asks. He feels bad for not even knowing who they’d been matched with, when they’d been going.

“We won, of course,” Neito says, with a huff. “I don’t know what they were thinking, putting Katsuki and I on the same team.” Izuku blinks.

“Katsuki?” he asks, and he hears Kacchan huff out an irritated breath.

“Fuckin’ copycat asshole keeps calling me that like,” Kacchan says. “I didn’t say that he could do it all of the time, just that I had a name and he should fucking use it instead of calling me blasty or whatever,” Kacchan says, arms crossed over his chest. Izuku blinks, watching Neito grin.

“You should have thought twice about giving me permission, then,” Neito says, shrugging. “You’re welcome to call me by my first name as well, but I don’t think I’ve ever heard you use *anyone’s* name,” he says, staring at Kacchan through half-lidded eyes. Kacchan makes a growling noise, but he turns his eyes to Izuku.

“Whatever,” Kacchan says. “What the fuck happened, Deku?” Izuku swallows, feeling a chill wash over him. He can feel Neito and Kacchan’s gazes on him, even as Izuku glances down at the floor.

“I...” Izuku pauses. He almost lies, almost says that it’s no big deal. He almost says that he’d just been tired, that it was something strange and that he doesn’t think it’s that important, not really. Instead, Izuku swallows, and draws in a breath.

“When I got hurt, it--it reminded me of--of when I...” Izuku trails off. He can’t say it, not where his other classmates could overhear, but he knows that Kacchan and Neito are smart enough to figure it out. It isn’t hard to piece together, really; Izuku’d been shot in his side. Izuku can see the exact moment that it clicks for Kacchan, his lips parting slightly and his brows furrowing. Neito’s the one that speaks, his voice soft.

“Are you feeling any better?” he asks, carefully. Izuku thinks for a moment, before nodding.

“I guess I--I think I’m a little shaken up,” Izuku says, staring down at his hands where they’re resting in his lap. “I still--I feel bad for doing that to Shinsou,” he says. He looks up at Neito, feeling his brow furrow slightly. “What did--what did the cameras pick up?” Izuku asks.

“It showed it all from a distance,” Neito answers. “We could see what was happening, but we couldn’t hear much.” He shifts slightly. “It was... it was clear something was wrong,” he adds, swallowing. He looks slightly uneasy. “I think the teachers were about to stop the fight, but then Shinsou knocked you out and they didn’t.” Izuku nods, his head bobbing up and down as he swallows.

“Okay,” he says, pressing his hands firmly into his thighs. “Okay.” Izuku doesn’t look up for a long moment, just staring at his legs and feeling the sensation of pressure on his skin. Izuku can see Neito shifting out of the corner of his eyes, thinks that he’s probably looking at Kacchan, that they’re probably exchanging some kind of a glance, but Izuku gives himself the few moments that he needs.

“So we’re all finished with our fights?” Izuku asks, finally, lifting his gaze up to look out the window, to the match below. He can’t make out specifics from this distance, but he can tell that someone is fighting down below from the quick movement and the flashes of light. He wonders whose quirk is making those, or if it’s a support item.

“Yeah,” Neito says. “There’s only two left,” he says, nodding to the window. Izuku nods absently,

watching, but he can't see much, not with how it's starting to grow dark out. *I guess this took longer than the teachers expected*, Izuku thinks. Next to him, Kacchan lets out a huff and stands up, crossing his arms over his chest.

"Oi, nerd," Kacchan says, his red eyes narrowed. Light from the window, golden-yellow and bright, spills across his face, casting it in sharp shadows and bright highlights. "You and Neito. We need to fucking talk," he says, and then he's turning to the side, stalking out of the viewing area. Izuku blinks, watching him go for a moment, before he turns his head to look at Neito.

"Should we...?" Izuku asks, frowning in confusion. Neito bites at his lower lip, his brows pressing down.

"I think so," Neito says, rising from his chair. He stands, offering a hand to Izuku. "Come on," he says, giving Izuku a faint smile. There's something bitter in his facial expression, something sharp in his tired blue eyes, but Izuku can't tell what it is. He takes Neito's hand, letting him tug Izuku up to his feet. Neito turns, starting to floor after Kacchan.

The door that Kacchan had walked through leads to a hallway, one that snakes around to the teacher's viewing area and has bathrooms and a water fountain, but not much else. Kacchan is waiting, not far into the hallway, his back pressed to the wall. His hands are in his pockets, and he's staring down at the floor, his red eyes narrowed. He glances up at Izuku and Neito as they walk into the hallway, but he doesn't speak, not until Izuku and Neito stop a few feet away from him.

"Your quirk isn't fucking foresight," Kacchan says, "is it?" His tone doesn't have any room for humor, doesn't have anything in it that helps to stop the chill that runs down Izuku's spine. Izuku steps back, swallowing hard. He stares at Kacchan for a moment, eyes wide, before he shifts his gaze to Neito.

"What did--what did you tell him?" Izuku asks, his voice slightly choked and laced with bright anger. Izuku sees Neito's brows knit together, sees his ice-blue eyes locked on Izuku as he shakes his head, his mouth opening a little.

"I-I didn't," Neito says, stepping back. Izuku takes a step forward, about to say something else, about to say that there's no other way, that Kacchan couldn't have possibly known if Neito didn't tell him, but Kacchan's snarl stops him.

"So there is something to tell," Kacchan snarls, and Izuku glances over to him to see his face painted with anger. "You told fuckin' Copycat before you told *me*, Deku?" Kacchan asks, his lips curling. "What the fuck?"

Izuku swallows, biting at his lower lip. "I-I didn't--" Izuku starts, but Neito cuts him off.

"He didn't tell me anything," Neito says, his voice sharp. "And he won't let me tell anyone else, either," he says, and when Izuku looks over at him, there's something bitter and twisted up on his face. *He's frustrated*, Izuku thinks, and that's what shocks him out of this, what stops Izuku from just spilling his guts, from telling Kacchan the truth.

Because regardless of what Izuku does, if Kacchan knows, it will make things harder for him. If Kacchan knows, he'll start to think about things like when Izuku was kidnapped at the same time as him, when Izuku was in the training camp, fighting the villains. Kacchan's smart, Izuku knows this. If Kacchan finds out about his quirk, Kacchan will know that things aren't right, that Izuku used it when classes were going on, that Izuku used it during the sports festival. Kacchan isn't stupid. He surely remembers what he said to Izuku, that day in middle school, and he knows that

Izuku found about his quirk around that time, already. If Izuku tells him, Kacchan will think that it was *his fault* that Izuku killed himself, over and over.

Izuku steels himself, turning his face hard and cold. He looks at Kacchan, letting his eyes fall half-shut, letting his brows draw low in something that he doesn't think is anger, but probably looks just like it. Izuku breathes in, out.

"We're not talking about this," Izuku says. "I'm not telling you, not right now. There's--there's too much going on right now," he says, pressing his eyes shut for just a moment. "I don't have the time or the energy to deal with this," he says, honestly.

"Izuku--" Neito starts, but he shuts his mouth when Izuku turns his gaze to him. Izuku knows that he's being unkind, that he's hurting Neito, but he tells himself that it's better for all three of them, in the end.

"Don't," Izuku says, and they both know what he means. "I'll tell Kacchan eventually, but it's going to--it's going to be on my own terms," he says, his hands clenching into fists at his sides. "You're not going to tell him," Izuku says, and he watches Neito's eyes widen, sees the pain flash on his face, and Izuku can't bear it anymore. He shuts his eyes, turning on his heels, and marching out of the hallway. He doesn't stop in the viewing room, ignores the questions of his classmates as he stalks out of the room, walking all the way back to the dorm.

Aizawa will scold him later, but he doesn't care. Izuku really just wishes that people would stop trying to figure things out, stop trying to tease his secrets out of him. *This is a burden that only I need to bear*, Izuku tells himself. *The more people that know, the more people have to suffer.*

--

It only takes about half an hour for there to be a knock on the door of his room. Izuku's been sitting on his bed, his hands twisted up in his lap as he stares down at the floor. His eyes have long grown tired and dry, but he's not crying, not really blinking, either. Izuku doesn't feel real. He feels like a piece of the furniture, like he's a tool, a toy that people have been pushing around, using for fun. He supposes it only makes sense; he has an incredible power, after all.

The knock at his door is firm and quick, just two knocks. Izuku thinks it's either Neito or Aizawa, and after a few moments where whoever it is doesn't try the doorknob themselves, Izuku decides that it must be Aizawa. Izuku forces himself to suck in a slow, even breath. He hopes Aizawa decides that he's asleep and leaves. A moment passes, quiet and slow, before Izuku hears another knock.

"Midoriya?" It is Aizawa, after all. "I know you're in there," he says. There's a pause. "I want to talk to you," he says. Izuku swallows. He moves his hands, clenching them tight in the fabric of his uniform pants. He hasn't changed, hasn't done anything.

"Okay," Izuku says, and he thinks for a moment that his voice was too quiet, but he hears a sigh from the other side of the door.

"Can I come in?" Aizawa asks, and Izuku imagines that he's resting his hand on the doorknob, leaning against the door and waiting, listening close for Izuku's reply. Izuku draws in a shaky breath.

"Yeah," he says, and he doesn't look up when he hears the doorknob click. He feels stupid, when he hears the lock stopping the door. Of course he'd locked it--he always locks it, now. Izuku expects to hear Aizawa again, asking him to unlock the door, but instead, he hears the sound of a

key being slid into the lock, turning over and undoing it. Izuku clenches his fingers tight in the fabric of his slacks. It's not a surprise, necessarily, that Aizawa has a key, and his teacher *did* ask before coming in, but it still feels like a betrayal.

"Midoriya," Aizawa says, his voice quiet and unwavering. Izuku hears the sounds of his teacher's footsteps become muddled as he moves off of the wooden floor, onto Izuku's rug. Izuku doesn't look up, watching as his arms shake, as his knuckles go white from pressure. He sees Aizawa, though, when the man crouches down in front of him, his face expressionless except for the slightest crease to his eyebrows, the slightest downturn of his lips. Izuku moves his eyes just the slightest bit, so they're making eye contact.

"Aizawa-sensei," Izuku says, and his voice comes out in a dry croak. He watches Aizawa's brow twitch.

"How are you feeling?" Aizawa asks. Izuku figures that it would probably be pointless to lie, considering that he's in his down room visibly having some kind of mental breakdown. Izuku swallows.

"Numb," Izuku says. "I-I shouldn't have freaked out like that," he blurts out. He hadn't meant to speak, not really, but it slips out of his own accord. Aizawa sighs, his breathing slow and calm, and the sound is strangely soothing to Izuku. Without thinking, he uncurls his hands from the legs of his pants and holds his hands out, like his reaching for Aizawa. Aizawa blinks, but after a moment, he seems to understand, reaching up to take Izuku's hands. His skin is rough and warm, and he gives Izuku's hands a light squeeze.

"You didn't do anything wrong, Midoriya," Aizawa says, his voice quiet. "It's completely reasonable for you to have a reaction like that, given what you've been through." He pauses a moment. "As a hero and your teacher, I should have realized this was a possibility. I can't go back in time, but I want to make it clear that if you need to sit out from a training exercise or stop part of the way through, you just need to say so." Aizawa squeezes Izuku's hands. "Okay?"

"I-I should--I should be able to get through it," Izuku says, averting his eyes. "The whole class has been through stuff. I should--I should be stronger," he says, squeezing back against Aizawa's hands. The pressure is grounding, and it clears enough of the numbness away that he has room for the swell of guilt and anxiety that rises up in his chest. Aizawa shakes his head.

"That's not how this works," Aizawa says. "You're already strong enough, and it doesn't make you weak to step back when you need to." Aizawa pauses, sighing. "I know you haven't been seeing Hound Dog much since your role with the Gekkeiju has become clear. I've been trying to get permission to grant him information on the situation, but..." Aizawa trails off for a moment. "Until he's given clearance, you can talk to anyone who's been at our meetings. But you need to talk to someone." Izuku swallows, looking at his teacher.

"I-I can talk to you?" Izuku asks. Aizawa's brows furrow slightly.

"Of course you can," he says, releasing Izuku's hands and standing up, before moving to sit beside Izuku on the bed. "I'm not a counselor or anything, but I can listen." Izuku nods, feeling the warmth emanating off of his teacher.

"I know," Izuku says. "I-I trust you, though," he says. He glances up to see Aizawa blink, looking almost surprised. After a moment, he sighs, gently reaching up a hand and setting it on top of Izuku's head. He moves slow enough that it doesn't startle Izuku, that Izuku doesn't flinch. He ruffles Izuku's hair gently.

"I'm glad, problem child," he says, his voice full of fondness.

--

When Izuku finds Haruta, it's just outside of class 2-A's dorm building. Izuku's glad when he spots the boy walking down the steps, his silver hair fluttering around him as the wind blusters past. Izuku hadn't wanted to have to go into the dorm and ask Ema if she knew where he was, but Izuku had figured that Haruta would spend at least some time in the 2-A dorm after class. *I'm lucky to run into him*, Izuku thinks.

"Haruta!" Izuku calls, hurrying after him. Haruta blinks, turning to look at him. Haruta stops walking, his ears twitching as he turns to face Izuku, his brows furrowed in confusion.

"Midoriya?" he asks. "What's going on?" He seems confused until Izuku moves closer to him, then a look of realization washes over his face. Izuku guesses that he'd just entered Haruta's range for his mind reading. Haruta's face twists slightly.

"I can't talk for long," he says, glancing over his shoulder. "I have a mission tonight." Izuku swallows, nodding.

"I'll walk you back to your place, then," Izuku says. Haruta blinks, then after a moment's pause, nods.

"You don't know where I live," Haruta says, turning and continuing to walk in the same direction he had been. Izuku follows after him, shoving his hands in his pockets to keep his fingers protected from the chill of the wind. Haruta sighs, his breath making a small cloud of mist in the air. It's started to grow dark outside, the sky streaked with gold and violet as the sun sits, half below the horizon and half still above it.

"In town, right?" Izuku asks. Haruta nods.

"I don't have to take the train or anything," he confirms. "It's about a thirty minute walk, though. You don't have to--to come with me the whole way," he says, reaching up a hand to brush his hair out of his face. Izuku shrugs.

"I don't mind, really," he says. "Walking keeps me warm." He and Haruta step under the gate that leads out of UA, into the city of Musutafu.

"What did--what did you want to talk about?" Haruta asks. From the way that he swallows, his throat bobbing with the movement, Izuku must not have thought about what, exactly, he wants to ask Haruta, at least not yet. Izuku swallows.

"How do you--how do you feel about getting out early?" he asks. He doesn't need to specify what he's talking about--he knows that Haruta will be able to tell he's talking about the Gekkeiju, talking about getting Haruta out of the group and into safety before the Commission finally, finally allows it. Izuku watches Haruta's eyebrows raise slightly, watches him bite at his lower lip.

"I-I don't want that," Haruta says, shaking his head. "I still--I still don't really plan on--on living," he says, shrugging. "But if they can--if they can get me out, that's fine. I don't want to put the mission at risk just for my sake," he says, his eyes on the ground. Izuku frowns.

"You don't care about the mission," Izuku points out. "I thought--I thought you were only doing this because you wanted to keep Ema safe." Haruta glances over at him. He folds his arms over his chest, looking away from Izuku. In the distance, a cloud drifts over the setting sun, casting the city in pale shadows for just a few moments.

“I don’t--I don’t *trust* them, Midoriya,” Haruta says, his voice bitter. “I don’t think Ema’s safe if I don’t--if I don’t do what the Commission wants.” He shivers. “You haven’t heard what--what they’re thinking. They really, really think that--that without us, Sasaki will get away.” Haruta breathes out, slowly. “Desperation makes people--it makes them do terrible things.”

Izuku swallows. “I don’t... I don’t want to wait for what they decide to do,” he says, clenching his hands into fists in the pockets of his coat. “I know you’re--you’re okay with dying, but I’m not okay with you--with you sacrificing yourself.” Haruta sighs.

“I know,” Haruta says. “It’s--I’m not changing my answer,” he says, shaking his head. “I--It’s not like you aren’t doing the same thing I am, anyway,” Haruta says, his eyes moving over to Izuku sharply. Izuku blinks.

“It’s not--it’s not the same,” Izuku protests. Haruta stares at him, his eyes narrowed.

“How is it any different?” he mutters. Izuku squints at him.

“I don’t actually die?” Izuku says, feeling like this should be obvious. Haruta sighs, giving himself a shake.

“You would if--if you didn’t have that quirk,” he says, and Izuku can’t disagree with him. He knows that he can’t lie to Haruta, so he sighs instead, staring down at the concrete of the sidewalk they’re walking along. It’s tinted a pale yellow with the light of the setting sun, and their shadows stretch dark and long beside them.

“Y-Yeah,” Izuku says. Haruta doesn’t say anything for a long moment, and the silence between them is filled with the soft sound of their footsteps and the distant noises of the city around them.

“Did you... did you have a--a plan?” Haruta asks, his lips twisting slightly into something that might be a frown. Izuku blinks, tilting his head to the side.

“N-Not yet,” Izuku admits. “I-I wanted to talk with you first, but I-I did have an idea.” Izuku shifts, blowing out a breath and watching the fog form in front of him. “If Ema knew, she’d--she’d stop you from going, right?”

Haruta blinks. “Y-Yeah, she would,” he confirms. “You... you want to tell her and to--to act like that’s why I’m not going?” He shakes his head. “It--it won’t work, the Commission will make me go u-until they fake me getting caught by--by UA.” His brow furrows. “Ema would--she’d have to go against the C--the Commission for me.” He shakes his head again, more firmly. “I can’t--”

“She’d rather do that then have you *die*,” Izuku says, cutting Haruta off. “You know that, don’t you?” Izuku stares up at him, wills Haruta to think about his sister. “And she--you guys have the same quirk, right? It’s just yours is more of the mind stuff and hers is more of the senses, isn’t it?” Izuku pauses, watching as Haruta nods, slightly. “So she--she definitely knows you’re in pain,” Izuku says. “Isn’t that hurting her?”

Izuku thinks, for a moment, that Haruta is going to get angry. He thinks that Haruta will snap at him, that Haruta will argue. But Haruta doesn’t. His face twists in frustration for a moment, but it passes in a heartbeat, and he stares at Izuku with wide, blue eyes. After a moment, Izuku realizes they’re filling with tears, and Izuku freezes. Haruta stops walking, too, and he reaches up, wiping away his tears with the heels of his hands.

“M-Midoriya, it--it would be *hard*,” Haruta sobs. “It would be hard and s-scary and--and I’m so *tired*,” he says, dropping his face into his hands. “I know--I know I’m hurting Ema and Maka, but

I--I just *can't* , Midoriya. I just--I just want to die.” His voice drops quieter and quieter with every word. Izuku swallows.

“I’m--I’m sorry, Haruta,” Izuku says, and then he’s pulling Haruta into a hug. Haruta flinches, but just barely, and then he’s clinging to the back on Izuku’s coat, shaking. Izuku rubs his back with one hand, like Aizawa’s done for him in the past, and he can’t help thinking that he gets it. He might not be as tired as Haruta is, but he’s on his way there.

And when he gets to that point, Izuku can’t run. He can’t just stop, can’t *die* . It’s not an option for him. Izuku breathes in and out, slowly. He knows that Haruta knows what he’s thinking. He knows that Haruta can hear this. Izuku tightens his grip on Haruta, letting the older student tug him in close.

“What if--what if I made it easy?” Izuku says, his voice shaky. “What if I did all the work, and all you--all you had to do is be with Ema and Maka?” He swallows. “What if you--what if you didn’t die, but you got a break? If you just got to *rest* for a while.” Izuku hears Haruta sigh.

“You can’t--you can’t promise me that,” Haruta says. Izuku swallows.

“I know,” Izuku says. “But--I can try,” he says, and he doesn’t mean to think *as many times as it takes* , but he does. He knows Haruta hears it from the way the boy stiffens.

“You’d do that for me?” Haruta asks, quietly. Izuku nods. Haruta pulls back, looking at Izuku. He searches Izuku’s face, his brows draw. Izuku wonders what he’s looking for. It’s not like Izuku can hide anything from him, not really.

“Okay,” Haruta says after a moment, his eyes shutting. “I’ll--I’ll think about it,” he says. Izuku swallows, letting a small smile pull at his lips as they pull apart from each other, starting back towards Haruta’s home.

“Thank you,” Izuku says, because while it isn’t a *yes* , it isn’t a *no* either. Haruta looks up at Izuku, one eyebrow raised and his mouth twisted into a small smile.

“You’re--you’re not going to give up until I let you save me,” Haruta says. It’s not a question, and Izuku knows that even if it had been, he wouldn’t have to answer, anyway. Haruta knows he’s right, knows that Izuku is going to save him, no matter what. Izuku watches Haruta sigh, shaking his head.

“You really are crazy, you know that, r-right?” Haruta says, still shaking his head. Izuku shrugs. He doesn’t think there’s much point in arguing about that one.

Chapter End Notes

content warning: uhhhuhuhuhhh tbh i don't remember but i think there's some dissociation stuff in there

[discord!](#) [carrd!](#)

i hope you enjoyed!!! im going to be answering some comments every now and then bc sometimes i miss when i used to reply to yall but i also don't have the time to Always do it :))

i tried a new cafe today and they had ROSEMARY ICE CREAM it sounds weird but
it's fuckin AMAZING i swear to yall

ruined

Chapter Summary

last time: kacchan asks izuku what tf his actual quirk is and izuku talks to haruta

Chapter Notes

hi guys!!!! sorry for this being late in the evening, some shit went DOWN the past few days :) hope ur all pogging and champing

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

It's unfair, Izuku thinks, that he has to go back to the tower before the start of winter break. He knows, of course, that the Gekkeiju have no way of knowing what they're planning, that Shinsou will be told on the last day of school. They have no way of knowing that Izuku is a bundle of raw nerves, even without going to the tower and having to try and work out what Manami plans to do with him, if Fury is going to hurt him again. It's a good thing, that they don't know, but it doesn't really help Izuku to feel any less anxious when Manami meets him in the lobby, a wide smile on her face.

Izuku notices the injuries before anything else. Manami's cheek is cut, the wound stretching from just beside her nose to her ear, and it's mostly covered in gauze, taped on with white medical tape. Near the edges, though, where the gauze doesn't completely cover it, Izuku can see that it's been stitched up with thin black thread. Manami's left arm is also in a sling, a plain black swath of fabric that holds it up to her chest. Underneath the sling, Izuku can see more white bandages, wrapped around her forearm.

"Hi, Midoriya!" Manami chirps as she steps off of the elevator, walking towards him. She's wearing her usual grey schoolgirl skirt and pink stockings, along with a white button-down shirt. Her hair is in the usual pigtails, and Izuku wonders if she'd been able to do that herself, or if she'd needed help because her arm is injured.

"Um, hi," Izuku says as she stops in front of him. Her orange eyes have the heart-shaped pupils that indicate her quirk is active, and it seems to be just making her happy, for now. She sways as she walks toward him, humming under her breath.

"You're a sight for sore eyes," she says, giggling. "Not all of my subordinates are as nice as you," she says, and Izuku blinks.

"I-Is that what happened?" Izuku asks, before he can think better of it. Manami doesn't seem to mind, though just nodding and pivoting on the balls of her feet, turning back towards the elevators.

"Mhm," she hums. Izuku follows behind her as she presses the button to call the elevators. The doors open almost immediately, which Izuku'd expected--Manami had just used it, after all. Izuku follows her onto the elevator, feeling his skin prickle with goosebumps. After this many weeks, the sharp, acute pain of being in the elevator has dulled to a low thrum of anxiety just under his skin.

Izuku still doesn't feel quite right, standing still as the elevator lurches under him, lifting the two of them up.

"What--what happened?" Izuku wets his lip with the tip of his tongue as he waits, watching Manami rock back and forth on the balls of her feet.

"Hm, just a mission," Manami says. "Sumimi and Kaz are still messing around with it, actually." She seems happy, almost. Izuku wonders if Miura and Fury are injured, too.

The elevator doors slide open, and Izuku recognizes the same hallway as last time. He follows Manami as she skips across the wooden floor, opening the door to the same room that they'd been the time before last. Izuku follows behind her, knowing that he's meant to walk into the room with her. It looks nearly identical to the last time, except Izuku swears that there are even more medical supplies on the shelves to the right. Izuku swallows, moving into the room and tugging the door shut behind him.

"Do you have the info from the last mission, Midoriya?" Manami asks, turning to him and holding out a hand. Izuku blinks, then nods, leaning down and unzipping his bag. It's become a routine, at this point, and it no longer feels unnatural to hand over information to a villain. Izuku wonders what it says about him, that he's more comfortable with this than he was in the joint training. He tugs out the folder, holding it up.

"Thanks!" Manami chirps, reaching out to take it. Her fingers nearly brush against Izuku's but he manages to pull his hands back at the last moment, avoiding the contact that would activate her quirk. Manami doesn't even seem to notice the near-contact, taking the files and flipping through the pages, scanning them. Izuku watches as her eyes move quickly, before she shuts the folder.

"Looks good," she says, before taking a few steps over to the shelving lining the left side of the room. "I've got another mission for you, but it's something different," she says, standing on her tiptoes to place the folder on top of a stack of papers high above her head. Izuku blinks, watching as she turns back to face him.

"Different?" he echoes, watching Manami nod excitedly, smiling.

"Yeah! I noticed you seemed kinda uncomfortable working with the kids and stuff," she says, moving over to the couch and flopping down onto it, leaning on the back of it to face Izuku. "So I switched some stuff around, and you're working with people your own age now." She smiles. "Plus, you and Kojima are friends, right? You'll be working together, so it'll be awesome!" Izuku swallows. He has a sinking feeling that he knows what this mission is, but he doesn't want to be right. He almost wants to tell Manami not to tell him, to just leave it until the last moment, but he knows he can't.

"What's--what's the mission?" he asks. Manami hums, leaning forward and resting her chin on the palm of one of her hands.

"You should sit," she says, jerking her head to the side, at the rest of the couch. "You look tired." Izuku blinks, then swallows, walking slowly around the couch. Manami watches him, and as she does, Izuku can see the hearts fade from her eyes. Izuku sits, tentatively, on the square of the couch furthest from Manami, his side pressed against the armrest. Manami stares at him with an unreadable expression, and Izuku wonders if she'd actually done this to be nice. If she'd thought that the problem was that Izuku didn't want to work with younger kids, if she'd done this to help him out, or if she'd done this to be cruel, like her brother.

"We want Shinsou to join us, you know," she says, and there's no preamble, nothing that leads up

to it. She pauses, like she's thinking. "I mean, you know Shinsou, right?" Manami tilts her head to the side, slightly. Izuku nods, the motion jerky and uncoordinated.

"Perfect!" she claps her hands together, grinning. Her edges blur and warp in rainbow colors as her quirk activates, and she seems to grow even more excited, leaning forward. Her eyes widen, making the hearts in her pupils even more obvious. Izuku swallows, leaning back slightly, as much as he can without making it obvious.

"Like I was saying, we really want Shinsou to join us," Manami says, her eyes sparkling. "His quirk is just so amazing, and if we have him, we can basically have anyone we want be nice to us, y'know?" She reaches up, brushing a loose strand of hair away from her forehead. "But we want him to join up willingly, and stuff. He'll be way easier to use if he's happy." She nods, looking delighted, but Izuku just feels sick. He swallows, trying to keep his face even, trying not to react. He breathes slowly, focusing on the rise and fall of his chest instead of the heavy feeling in his heart.

"What--what do you want me to do?" Izuku asks. He hopes that his voice doesn't sound too shaky, that he doesn't sound too unnerved. Manami just grins wider, bouncing a little as she replies.

"I want you to get him to join, of course! I know it's different with you, since you joined so Mom wouldn't kill you, but he could get loads of money and stuff from us." Manami nods to her own words. "He'd be joining at a pretty high ranking, too, so he'd get a room in the tower, and I could even get him any drugs he wants, that kind of stuff."

Izuku just stares back at her for a long moment, his mouth dry and his chest tight. He doesn't move his face, though, doesn't let his breathing hitch or his eyebrows drop. He just stares at her, an even, blank look on his face.

"You want me to convince him?" Izuku asks. It feels like there's a storm brewing in his chest, like he's a pot about to boil over, but he holds perfectly still. Manami nods.

"Yup!" she says, tipping her head to the side and giving Izuku a close-eyed smile. "It should be easy, since he trusts you." Izuku nods, repressing the shiver that tries to climb up his spine.

"Okay," Izuku says, and he's trying so hard not to react, not to show his fear, that he doesn't think to move away when Manami reaches a hand out, clapping it on her shoulder. It wouldn't be a problem, wouldn't mess things up, but the edge of Manami's thumb just barely brushes against the skin of Izuku's neck, where the collar of his shirt ends. Izuku feels the rush of Manami's quirk, the twist of adrenaline, and then things seem to collapse in on themselves.

Izuku feels himself reel back from Manami's touch, first, flinching away like he'd been burned. He feels his eyes widen, feels his breathing start to come quick and harsh in his throat. It's like he's choking, almost immediately, and the anxiety and guilt that flows through him is so strong that the world itself feels a million miles away. Izuku's world is quickly reduced to the painful-fast pounding of his heart and the way he can't quite draw in air like he should, the way he's breaths are tiny and quick and painful. Izuku curls away from Manami, pressing himself into the couch, and he hears himself whimpering, vaguely. Alarm bells ring in his head, telling him that he can't react like this, that he shouldn't be showing that he's upset, but all it does is worsen the tightness of his chest.

"Midoriya?" Manami asks, and she sounds surprised, almost concerned. Izuku shakes his head, inching away from her as much as he can without uncurling himself. He presses the palm of his hand over his mouth, trying to stifle the little noises that keep escaping him. He feels like he's dying, like he's being chased by someone, like he has Fury on his heels as he runs for his life. He

feels like he's back in the morgue, tied to the table. He can't breathe.

"Damn," Manami says, and Izuku opens his eyes just enough to see her brow creased in concern. Her eyes are still heart-shaped, and Izuku shivers as he looks at her. She's never looked more like Fury to him than she does now, with fear thick in his chest.

"Midoriya, you should calm down," Manami says, biting at her lower lip. "It goes away if you feel nothing, remember? It's a multiplier, so if you multiply zero, you're still at zero." Izuku shakes his head, moving his hands to hug himself.

"I-I--" Izuku bites his lip. "I c-can't," Izuku says, and his voice comes out as more of a whine than anything else. He shivers, his face and hands tingling with the lack of oxygen, but he still can't make his breathing slow down at all.

"It's not easy when you're that upset, is it?" Manami asks, and her voice is warm with sympathy. Izuku barely even registers it as the roar in his head grows louder and louder. He wonders if it'll wear off, if he just passes out. He only vaguely notices as Manami stands up, lifting the edge of her skirt slightly to reveal the sheath of a knife, strapped to her upper thigh. She unsheathes it with a slick metal sound, and Izuku braces himself for the pain, for the punishment. His eyes are glued to the silvery metal as Manami flips it around, offering the hilt to him.

"If you cut yourself, it makes everything go away for just a moment," she says, a frown on her face. "It'll make you feel better," she says, and it's all Izuku needs to hear. He reaches out with a shaking, numb hand, wrapping his fingers around the hilt of the knife. The surface of it is warm from being pressed to Manami's skin, and it feels strange with the way that Izuku's fingers and tingling. He grips the knife tightly in his hand, moving his other arm away from his chest. He tugs at the sleeve with his teeth, but he can't get it past his elbow, so he doesn't bother.

Izuku plunges the knife into the belly of his forearm, digging the edge of the blade into his flesh. The sensation of pain is bright and sharp, and it cuts through the pain and the panic in Izuku's body. The sensation of panic, of anxiety and fear and pain, rushes away in an instant. It doesn't leave for long, doesn't give him much of a break, but it's enough. Izuku sighs with relief, leaning back and letting his eyes slide shut as he takes in the sensation of normal anxiety, instead of the crushing feeling he'd had moments before.

"I'll go get gloves," Manami says, her voice quiet. Izuku opens his eyes, blinking to see Manami moving over to the right wall, to the medical supplies. He's confused for a moment, before he looks down at his forearm, sees the deep cut in his forearm, cutting through the top layers of skin and deep into the bubbly yellow fat below. Izuku suddenly feels nauseous, watching blood rise out of the wound in steady pulses, trickling out of the cut and onto his lap. It splatters off of the couch, falling in clean droplets. *The couch is waterproofed*, Izuku realizes as he stares at it, watches his blood spill off of the couch and soak into the rug, staining it dark.

"Give me your arm," Manami says, and Izuku blinks up at her, momentarily confused. She's standing in front of him, her face blank except with a slight downward turn to the corners of her lips. She's wearing a pair of blue nitrile gloves, a thick bundle of gauze in one hand and a white plastic bin with a handle in the other. She sets the bin down, and Izuku can see that it's full of other medical supplies. Izuku swallows, gingerly lifting his injured arm. The movement sends a twinge of pain through the slice in his arm, and he can't help but wince.

"Sorry," Izuku says, staring down at the floor as Manami takes his arm. Her fingers are warm even through the material of the glove, and Izuku tries not to wince as he feels the gauze pushing against the wound, the pain bright and sharp. It focuses him, bringing his anxiety to a manageable level as the pain sucks the breath out of him.

“You didn’t have to do it this deep, you know,” Manami says, pressing the gauze firmly into his wound. “It works plenty well with just a little one.”

“I know,” Izuku says, his voice a croak. “I just--I haven’t not since--not since late September.” His voice cracks, embarrassingly. Izuku hates that it’s been that long, that Izuku’s been able to resist that long only to ruin it. Izuku flinches, jerking in pain as Manami peels the gauze back, clicking her tongue.

“That needs stitches,” she says with a rueful sigh. Izuku swallows, looking up to her. Her eyes aren’t hearts, not anymore, and she looks almost remorseful as she meets his gaze.

“O-Okay,” Izuku says. He braces himself for the pain that he knows will be coming, but when Manami reaches into the bin, she pulls out a tube of some kind of cream.

“It’s numbing gel,” she says, unscrewing the top and squeezing a small bead out onto her gloved finger. Izuku blinks, watching as she smears a thin layer over his skin.

“Oh,” Izuku says. Manami looks up to him, a sad smile on her face.

“It’s still gonna hurt a lot,” she says. “Sorry.” She looks like she means it as she reaches into the bin, pulling out a thin plastic box. Izuku can see what looks like a suture kit inside, all dark thread and thin, silver needles. Izuku’s so surprised that she’s even apologizing, that she’s even trying to make him hurt less and not more, that he can’t help but ask.

“Manami,” Izuku starts, watching as Manami messes with the kit, examining the contents. She looks up at him, blinks.

“Yeah?” she tilts her head to the side slightly, her hair shifting with the movement.

“Have you... have you ever wanted to leave the Gekkeiju?” Izuku asks. He knows it’s not a good idea to ask, that he’s putting himself at risk for no reason by doing so, but he can’t help it. Manami just blinks, tipping her head to the side even more.

“Why would I?” she replies, simply. Izuku stares at her, eyes wide. He doesn’t say anything else as she starts to stitch up his arm, even as the prick of the needle stings and burns.

--

Izuku is numb by the time he gets back to UA. He knows full well that he won’t be able to get away with pretending that nothing happened, knows that the wire embedded in the hem of his shirt will keep him from lying and saying the meeting went well. He almost hopes that it was Rivera listening in, not Aizawa or Nezu, because he doesn’t think that there’s a chance of Rivera caring that Izuku hurt himself. Nezu’s harder to read, but he’d also surely tell Aizawa, and that’s where the problem lies. Aizawa’s going to be mad at Izuku, going to lecture him and scold him and--and Izuku isn’t sure, but he knows that he doesn’t want to have to deal with it.

So, when Izuku reaches the gate to campus and sees Aizawa, leaning against the side of the UA barrier, he wants to turn and run. He wants to wait under he isn’t expected, then slip into campus and pretend that nothing ever happened. He wants, desperately, for Aizawa to turn around and walk back into the school. Instead, he pushes himself off of the gate, taking a few quick steps towards Izuku. His brows are drawn in concern, his lips set in a thin line as he stops in front of Izuku.

“Midoriya, are you okay?” Aizawa asks, his eyes fixed on Izuku, looking his body up and down. Izuku swallows, holding out his arm. He knows Aizawa is looking for his injury, looking for

where Izuku had hurt himself. Aizawa takes his arm gingerly, rolling up the sleeve with warm, deft fingers to reveal the neatly wrapped gauze holding the dressing in place over the wound.

"I'm okay," Izuku says, his voice sounding distant. "Manami cleaned me up." He watches as Aizawa frowns, releasing Izuku's arm.

"Let's get you to the infirmary," Aizawa says, his lips pressed together. He steps to the side, letting Izuku walk the rest of the way through the gate, into the UA campus. Izuku walks obediently forward, towards the infirmary building. It feels pointless, really. He doesn't want this wound healed, not when he'd only had to do it because he was too weak to control his emotions in the first place. Izuku lets Aizawa walk beside him, lets him hover maybe a little too close. Izuku thinks that it's supposed to make him feel secure, but it doesn't do much of anything. Izuku feels far, far too numb for that.

"Since September," Aizawa says when they're mere steps from the infirmary doors. His eyes are fixed on Izuku. "I'm proud of you, Midoriya. That's a long time."

Izuku bites his lower lip, shaking his head. "You--you shouldn't be proud of me, sensei. I-I ruined it." Izuku squeezes his eyes shut for just a moment as Aizawa opens the door to the building. He hears Aizawa breathe out, and when Izuku looks up at him, he's holding the door open for Izuku, a sad look on his face.

"Midoriya, someone handed you a knife and told you to cut yourself while you were under the effects of a mental quirk," Aizawa says, sighing. "You shouldn't blame yourself for that." He jerks his head toward the inside of the building, and Izuku nods, averting his eyes from his teacher as he shuffles into the building. It's almost uncomfortably warm inside after having been in the cold, and Izuku can't help the reflexive shiver that passes through him, like his body is protesting the change.

Up ahead, the door to the main infirmary is open, and Izuku lets Aizawa move in front of him, leading him into the room. Izuku trains after him, unsurprised to see Recovery Girl waiting just inside the door. It's clean and brightly lit inside, and Izuku's grateful that his mom doesn't seem to be there, at least not for the moment. He doesn't want her to have to worry any more than necessary.

"Ah, Midoriya," Recovery Girl says, walking over to him as he stands not far from the entrance to the room. "Let me see your arm, if you would." Izuku nods, rolling up his sleeve.

"It's--it should already be cleaned up," Izuku says, watching as Recovery Girl unwinds the bandages, revealing the gauze dressing underneath. Izuku doesn't move as she pries the gauze off of the wound.

"Hm, this is very well done," she remarks. "I'd almost rather leave it like this, with how poorly you sleep." She leans forward, planting a kiss on Izuku's forehead that he almost flinches away from, stopping himself at the last moment. Izuku feels something shift in the wound, a little bit of energy draining out of him, but it isn't much.

"That should stop it from scarring and speed the healing," Recovery Girl says, carefully replacing the gauze. "Come back here tomorrow morning and I'll heal it enough to take the stitches out, completely if you actually *sleep* at night," she says, clucking her tongue as she winds the gauze around the dressing.

"I don't want you to be alone tonight, Midoriya," Aizawa says, his voice low. Izuku blinks, looking over to him.

"I-I can handle it," Izuku protests. "This--this isn't even that bad," he says, waving at his injured arm with his free hand. Aizawa sighs.

"Just let someone stay with you, for my sake if nothing else," Aizawa says. "It doesn't have to be me, if you'd rather one of your friends do it." Aizawa's eyes narrow, his face looking worn and the space under his eyes dark with exhaustion. Izuku swallows, then nods. *I'm doing this for Aizawa-sensei's sake, not mine*, he tells himself.

"Okay," Izuku says. Aizawa seems to relax, just the slightest bit. Izuku isn't sure if he's even really noticing something or just imagining it, really, but it makes him feel just the smallest bit better.

"Who do you want with you?" Aizawa asks. Izuku blinks, chewing at his lower lip. Izuku doesn't want to talk about feelings. He doesn't want someone who knows about his self harm, someone who knows about his quirk. He doesn't want someone who will worry, who will care too much. Izuku swallows.

"Kacchan," he says, after a moment. If Aizawa is surprised, he doesn't show it. Instead, he nods, meeting Izuku's eyes.

"He's here this weekend," Aizawa says, as if Kacchan isn't here every weekend. "I'll walk you to the dorm," he says. Izuku nods, and he lets Aizawa lead him across campus and up the stairs, to the place that Izuku has come to think of as home.

--

It only takes Kacchan a few minutes to arrive at Izuku's dorm room after Aizawa left to go find him. Izuku supposes it isn't much of a surprise; it's not like there's a ton of space between his room and Kacchan's, anyway. What Izuku isn't expecting, though, is the way that Kacchan is wearing sweats and a t-shirt, his hair mussed up and his eyes bleary, like he'd just woken up from sleeping. Izuku blinks, looking up from Kacchan to Aizawa, who's standing behind him.

"If you don't need anything else, I'll leave you two to it," Aizawa says, his hands in his pockets. Izuku blinks, then nods.

"W-We should be fine," he says. Kacchan grunts in agreement, stepping into the room. He tugs the door shut behind him, cutting off Izuku's view of Aizawa completely.

"Fuckin' Aizawa wouldn't tell me what's going on," Kacchan says, his crimson eyes narrowing. "Just that you're hurt or some shiit and that you need someone to babysit you." He folds his arms over his chest. "So you'd better start fuckin' explaining."

Izuku sighs, long and slow. He should have known, that Kacchan wouldn't just accept it without any explanation. *I should have just asked for Neito*, Izuku thinks. *At least then, there wouldn't be anything left to explain.*

"It's--it's classified," Izuku says, turning and walking over to his bed. He sits on the mattress, drawing his knees up to his chest. His feet feel too cold, even with the thick socks he's wearing, and he wonders, briefly, if Kacchan would be annoyed if Izuku got under the covers. It's only early evening, but Izuku is so tired that he feels like he could sleep forever.

"Classified my *ass*," Kacchan snaps. "What's Aizawa so worried about happening that I'm stuck watching your ass?"

Izuku snorts, a bitter sound. "You can--you can leave, if you want," Izuku says. "I'm not going to tell Aizawa-sensei." Izuku looks down at the floor, at the dark green rug covering the wooden

flooring. He sighs, breathing out. For a moment, he thinks that Kacchan is going to just leave, but then he feels the bed bend down as Kacchan sits on the bed beside him.

“You’re not getting rid of me that easy,” Kacchan says, his voice quiet, but still angry. “Tell me why Aizawa has me watching you,” he demands. Izuku swallows, wrapping his arms around his legs.

“He’s--he’s worried that I’m going to--that I’m going to hurt myself,” Izuku says, his voice quiet. The room is silent for a moment, just the whir of the heater breaking up the noise.

“What the fuck, Deku?” Kacchan asks, but there’s no heat to it. “What the *fuck* ?” he repeats. Izuku glances over at him, sees Kacchan’s brows creased, his mouth set in a frown. “You--you fucking--” he shakes his head. “Did you--”

“I have,” Izuku says, cutting Kacchan off. “I--I told you, so--so can we not talk about it, please?” He swallows, leaning forward and burying his face in his knees. “I don’t want to talk about it.” Izuku shuts his eyes, breathing in as he listens to the sound of Kacchan shift.

“Fine,” Kacchan says, his voice tight. “We won’t talk about that shit.” There’s a pause, and Izuku wonders if that’s it, but Kacchan starts talking again. “You’ve got to answer one question, though.” Izuku sighs, breathing into his knees.

“What?” he asks, his voice coming out as a croak more than anything. He hears Kacchan exhale.

“Do you have to hurt yourself to use that fucking quirk?” Kacchan asks. There’s something angry in his voice, but Izuku doesn’t think it’s directed at him, for some reason. Izuku sighs.

“I said that--that I didn’t want to talk about it,” Izuku murmurs. He flinches in surprise when he feels Kacchan sling an arm over his shoulder. The motion isn’t harsh, isn’t threatening. It feels like Kacchan is... trying to comfort him.

“Okay,” Kacchan says, and Izuku can hear him exhale through his nose. “But I’m not going to let you--you can’t fucking hurt yourself, okay?” He grips Izuku tighter, and Izuku lets himself melt into the motion.

“Okay,” Izuku says, his voice weak and shaky. “Okay.”

Chapter End Notes

content warning: medical stuff, self harm, panic attacks, nausea

[discord!](#) [carrd!](#)

im so sleepy rip but i don't have class tomorrow, just work, so i should be okay... i need a spring break :) my school didn't give us one this year

snowfall

Chapter Summary

last time: izuku goes to the tower where manami has him hurt himself to break her quirk. he goes home and kacchan stays with him.

Chapter Notes

hello my little frogchamps. i am currently very very exhausted but I've been looking forward to this chap for AGES so here u go

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Kacchan stays like that, his arm draped over Izuku's shoulders and his body heat soaking into Izuku, until Izuku starts to uncurl, starts to breathe normally again. He's not sure exactly when he started crying--he doesn't remember when it started, but when he picks his head up, he has to wipe away half-dried tears from his eyes and cheeks, tiny grains of salt scraping against the puffy, swollen skin. Kacchan doesn't say anything, just watches Izuku quietly, and Izuku's grateful for that. He's still not ready to talk.

Izuku rubs at his face again, just for good measure, before he straightens his legs out, letting them dangle off the edge of the bed. It feels like it's been hours, but when he glances over to the balcony door, the brightness of the light drifting through the spaces around the curtains tells him it couldn't have been long at all. Izuku sighs, his chest feeling damp as he does so, the strange sensation that only comes after crying. Izuku looks back to Kacchan, who's watching him with narrowed red eyes.

"Sorry," Izuku says, quietly, and Kacchan huffs out an irritated breath of air.

"What the fuck are you apologizing for?" Kacchan asks, but his hand on Izuku's shoulder grips him a little tighter. Izuku chuckles a little, under his breath.

"I'm not--I'm not going to hurt myself, you know," he says. Kacchan raises an eyebrow.

"Why the fuck is Aizawa having me watch you, then?" he asks, and Izuku can tell that he doesn't believe Izuku for a second. Izuku sighs, resisting the urge to roll his eyes.

"How much do you--do you know, about what happened with Mouse?" Izuku asks. He's never really been clear on what, exactly, everyone was told. He knows that some people know more than others, that some people know he has a quirk and some people know he's Ace and some people just think it was freak chance that he found Mouse, that some people don't know he was the one who saved her at all. It's all muddled up in Izuku's brain, though. He thinks it's because he's spent so much time trying to keep his own knowledge straight. He just doesn't have the room in his brain to remember what everyone else knows or doesn't. It's easier to keep everything quiet, to keep everything close to his chest.

“Aizawa told Icyhot and Copycat and I that you were Ace or some shit and that you went to go attack some villain group,” Kacchan says, his brows furrowing slightly. “He said you grabbed the kid and that other chick and fuckin’ ran like halfway across Japan.” Kacchan’s eyes narrow further. “What the fuck does that have to do with this?”

Izuku sucks in a breath of air. “I didn’t--I didn’t just attack the villain group,” he says. “I infiltrated them.” He clenches his hands in the fabric of the bed, wrinkling the blanket. “They don’t know I’m the one who rescued Mouse and Ren.” Izuku doesn’t look at Kacchan, but he can feel him tense up, can feel the muscles in his arms go hard and shake slightly.

“You’re still fucking working with them,” Kacchan breathes, and it’s all Izuku can do to nod just the tiniest bit. He hears the hiss that Kacchan lets out, a tiny sound of air slipping through gritted teeth.

“I-I hadn’t--I hadn’t hurt myself since September,” Izuku says, tracing little circles in his comforter with the index finger of one hand. “But yesterday, I--one of the villains, she has an--an emotional amplification quirk.” Izuku pauses, takes a breath. “She used it on me by accident, and she--she offered me a knife, said it would make it stop.”

“Jesus fuck, Deku,” Kacchan hisses, and when Izuku looks up at him, he’s running his free hand down his face, his features twisted in pain. “Yeah, no fuckin’ wonder Aizawa was worried about you,” he says, his arm around Izuku’s shoulders tightening.

“I’m--I’m really not going to do it again,” Izuku says, giving Kacchan a weak smile. “It was--I didn’t really want to, so it’s not like--it’s not something I want to do again.” He leans into Kacchan. “Sensei’s just being careful,” he says, and he thinks that he actually believes it. Kacchan doesn’t say anything for a long moment, and when Izuku looks over at him, there’s a dark look on his face, his brows low above his crimson eyes.

“When did you start?” Kacchan asks, his voice quiet. Izuku blinks, then shifts uneasily, biting at his lower lip.

“Um, it was between middle school and starting at UA, I think,” Izuku says. “I--I had only had my quirk for a little bit, and I-I just--it was a lot,” he says. He doesn’t say that his quirk is what encouraged him to start, that he’d killed himself long before he started to just hurt himself. Kacchan nods. He breathes in, like he’s trying to calm himself.

“You started after you got your quirk,” Kacchan says, “so you don’t have to do it to use the damn thing, right?” He looks at Izuku, his eyes narrowed. “And you said I wouldn’t like the activation requirements. So what is it, then? What the fuck do you have to do to activate your quirk?” He’s shaking the tiniest bit, and Izuku thinks that maybe, Kacchan already knows the answer. Maybe he’s figured it out, and maybe he just doesn’t want it to be true. Izuku sighs.

“There’s--there’s a lot of stuff going on right now,” he says, staring at Kacchan’s chest instead of his face. “I--we’re about to--someone else is going to have to go undercover,” he says, his mouth twisting into a grimace. “Can I--can I tell you after? I don’t think I can h-handle that right now.” Izuku knows he’s being selfish, but he can’t help it. He thinks that, after everything he’s been through, he’s earned his secrets, at least. Kacchan stares at him for a long moment, his eyes flickering over Izuku’s face like he’s looking for something, before he sighs, his gaze dropping.

“Fine,” Kacchan says. “But you’re going to fucking tell me,” he says, his gaze snapping back up to Izuku’s face. “Before the end of winter break. I’m not letting you get away with hiding this shit any longer than that, he says. His eyes burn bright, and Izuku swallows as he nods.

“Okay,” Izuku says. “I’ll tell you before winter break is over,” he says, breathing out long and slow. He sits for a moment, holding still, before Kacchan breaks the silence with a sigh.

“C’mon,” Kacchan says, hopping off of the bed and untangling his arm from Izuku’s shoulders. “I’ll cook something nice for dinner, or whatever,” he says, turning to offer Izuku a hand.

“Thanks, Kacchan,” Izuku says, smiling slightly. He takes Kacchan’s hand, even though he doesn’t really need help getting up from the bed.

--

Izuku doesn’t know what he expects when he goes to sleep the night before they tell Shinsou, but he hates himself for being surprised when he wakes up crying, hot tears streaming down his face. His breaths are coming too fast and too shallow, and he curls up into a ball, squeezing his knees up to his chest.

It’s almost funny, he thinks, that Aizawa made Kacchan watch him just a few nights ago, but he doesn’t freak out until now. It makes sense, really, that he’d have this kind of a reaction just hours from when he’ll have to tell Shinsou *hey, I ruined your life*, but it still catches him off-guard just enough that he can’t quite get ahold of himself. He curls tight into himself, wondering if he’ll just pass out if he hyperventilates intensely enough. It feels like that’s going to end up happening, regardless of what he wants, anyway.

On nights like these, Izuku goes to Shinsou. It’s only been five, maybe six times that Shinsou’s helped him sleep with his quirk, but Izuku’s already used to it, and he hates himself for it. Izuku’s been burdening Shinsou with his problems, been getting help from the very person he’s going to hurt. Even now, with the guilt that burns through him, he wants to go to Shinsou’s room, ask to be put to sleep. He wants to brush away the last traces of the nightmare that he can’t even remember.

I can’t, he tells himself as his breathing starts to slow in the way that it does when the dream fades from his memory, when his heart rate slows and his body remembers that he’s in his room and not wherever he’d been in his nightmare. Izuku feels wretched. He feels so stupid, so useless, and so *tired*. He doesn’t want to go back to sleep only to dream of more horrors, but he can’t ask Shinsou to do this for him, not mere *hours* from when they’re breaking the news to him, telling him that he’s going to have the choice to sell his soul or have it stolen, telling him that Izuku and Haruta haven’t been *training* behind his back.

So Izuku gets out of bed, the sweat cooling on his skin leaving him feeling cold and damp as he shuffles to his closet. He opens the door to the closet, kneels on the floor, the wooden flooring digging into his knees even with the rug to cushion them. He opens the box that he keeps his supplies in, shuffles around the sweater he has covering the real contents. He pulls out a razor blade, one that he’s only ever used before in the way that doesn’t last, in the way that turns back time. Izuku pulls out squares of gauze and butterfly bandages.

Izuku knows that Aizawa will be watching him, that he’ll be checking Izuku’s arms when Izuku goes to Recovery Girl or when he’s in training. He knows that his mom and Recovery Girl and Aizawa and Nezu are all on their guard, that they’re expecting Izuku to slip up. Izuku isn’t stupid. He’s not going to add to their burden.

He slips out of his sleep shorts and cuts his thighs instead. His legs don’t bleed quite as much as his arms, but he can cut far deeper, and for that, he’s grateful.

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Izuku feels like he's waiting for an execution as he sits at the table in the conference, Haruta to his right and Mirko to his left. Aizawa sits beside Nezu on Mirko's other side, with Tsukauchi sitting between Haruta and Nighteye. There's a seat between Nighteye and Koizumi, with Rivera beside her, looking almost bored.

"Who are we still waiting for?" Mirko asks, her arms folded over her chest. "Just Yamauchi and Shinsou, right?"

"What about--what about Hawks?" Izuku asks, his voice quiet and shaky with nerves. Rivera glances over to him.

"Hawks is unavailable at the moment," Rivera says. "He has... another mission to attend to." Rivera reaches up, adjusting the deep green tie at his neck. Izuku swallows, nodding.

"Yamauchi is on her way," Nighteye says, and when Izuku glances over to him, he's turning over his phone and laying it screen-side down on the table. "She'll arrive soon." Izuku shifts uneasily in his seat. He glances to the side, at Haruta, who meets his eyes for a moment. Izuku wonders, briefly, if Haruta can tell that he hurt himself last night, then realizes abruptly that if Haruta didn't know before, he definitely knows now. Haruta's face barely shifts other than his eyebrows lowering slightly, his lips parting just the tiniest bit. Izuku averts his eyes, cursing himself for thinking about it in the first place.

Just as Izuku glances away, he hears the door open. He turns, glancing over to see Ren walking inside. She raises a hand, giving him a wide smile. Izuku gives a thin, nervous smile in return, hoping that he doesn't look as unsteady as he feels. Ren sits down in the place beside Nezu, sliding neatly into the chair. Her long, braided hair is damp from the rain outside.

"Did you walk here?" Nezu chirps, asking the question that Izuku had been thinking. Ren glances over to the principal, grinning.

"I'm just happy to be walking again," Ren says, shrugging off the jacket she's wearing. "I'll be back on the job in a few weeks, if Nighteye ever actually lets me." From the other side of the room, Nighteye sighs heavily.

"You will not be on the streets again until the situation with the Gekkeiju is resolved," Nighteye says, his voice even and measured, like he's said it plenty of times before. Ren sighs, rolling her eyes, but Izuku can tell that there's no real annoyance in the gesture.

"He's--he's almost here," Haruta says, his voice shaky. Izuku swallows, feeling his muscles tense up. There's no need for Haruta to specify *who* is almost here--there's only one person who he could mean. Izuku shivers, wondering what it is that Haruta is hearing Shinsou think. He doesn't get much of a chance to think about it, though, because the door is opening, tugging open just enough to show Shinsou standing there. He's wearing his school uniform, and when he sees the inside of the room, his eyebrows raise and his eyes widen. There's a moment where he seems frozen, before his eyes move over Izuku and Haruta, and his eyes narrow, his face twisting into a frown.

"What is this?" Shinsou asks, his hand tightening around the strap of his backpack where he's holding onto it. His gaze is hard, and Izuku feels something ice cold gather in his gut when Shinsou looks over to Aizawa with that expression of fear, of pain. *Of betrayal*, Izuku's mind supplies.

"Have a seat," Aizawa says, his voice even and his face blank. "And close the door behind you." Izuku watches Shinsou's eye twitch, but he steps into the room anyway, tugging the door shut behind him. Izuku watches, unable to look away as Shinsou walks slowly over to the seat beside

Ren. His eyes linger on her for a moment before flickering back up to Izuku. Shinsou doesn't say anything, just stares at Izuku with hard, angry eyes. Izuku doesn't want to know how bad it will be once he knows.

"Hello, Shinsou," Rivera says, and Izuku watches Shinsou's eyes snap over to him. "My name is Jonathan Rivera. I'm with the Hero Public Safety Commission."

"I'm Koizumi!" Koizumi chirps from beside him. "I'm his apprentice, so to speak. I'm guessing you're already familiar with everyone else here?" She tilts her head to the side slightly. Shinsou stares at her for a moment before he nods.

"I do," he replies, warily. "I don't know why I'm here, though," he says, carefully, slowly. Izuku thinks that, maybe, he's avoiding asking a question. It reminds him of Mouse, small and sad and scared for her quirk to activate, even by accident. Izuku feels sick to his stomach.

"You have your provisional license, yes?" Rivera asks, his voice calm, almost friendly. "But you haven't taken on a work study." He tips his head to the side slightly, his dark green eyes fixed on Shinsou as Shinsou nods, hesitantly.

"Get to the point, Rivera," Ren says, tapping her fingers on the table, a smile on her face. Izuku feels the tension in the room rise as Rivera sighs, his eyes narrowing.

"I was hoping to do this with some tact, Yamauchi," Rivera replies. His eyes slide back over to Shinsou. "The Commission has a mission for you, Shinsou." He steeples his hands in front of his face, leaning forward.

"How much do you know about the organization known as the Gekkeiju?" Koizumi asks, tipping her head to the side slightly. Izuku glances to Shinsou, chewing on his lower lip as he watches Shinsou's eyes narrow.

"I've never heard of them," he says, his voice flat. "But I'm not interested in working for the Commission." He stares straight at Rivera, his eyes not wavering. Izuku swallows.

"I think you'd like to hear all of the details before you make a decision," Rivera says, his voice calm. "The Gekkeiju are a group of villains that have been operating in the shadows of Japan for the past few years," Rivera says. "They are headed by a mass murderer who has been responsible for the deaths of over one hundred people across the globe." He knits his fingers together, dropping his hands down to rest on the table in front of him. "In Japan, they have been primarily targeting children and young adults with powerful quirks. We do not currently know the final goal of this organization, but we do know that they are willing to kill and torture to get what they want."

"You, Shinsou," Rivera says, leaning forward, "are their next target." Izuku swallows, glancing over to see Shinsou, his brows furrowed slightly.

"Because of my quirk," Shinsou says, his voice dark and his eyes angry. Rivera simply nods.

"You have two options," Rivera says. "You may join them willingly, acting as a spy alongside Kojima and Midoriya," he says, holding up one finger. "Or, you may be placed under protective custody. You'd remain on campus 24/7, and there would be a hero assigned to you at all times." Rivera holds up a second finger, then sighs, dropping his hands back to the table. "I must warn you, though. There is a high likelihood that the Gekkeiju will capture you regardless of any protection you are put under." Rivera sighs, his eyes closing for a moment. "Tsukauchi."

"R-Right," Tsukauchi says, swallowing. He glances over at Rivera, then Shinsou. "A week ago,

the League infiltrated Tartarus,” he says, his face serious. “They were able to successfully retrieve Kurogiri, who, as I’m sure you’re aware, has the ability to warp.” Tsukauchi’s lips twist into a grimace. “We have reason to believe that the Gekkeiju assisted them with the break-in. It’s very likely that, even with our best efforts, you would eventually be taken.” Izuku swallows, turning to see Shinsou’s lip curling up in a sneer.

“So you’re admitting that you’re useless,” he says, his eyes narrowed. Izuku swallows, glancing over to see Rivera’s brow twitch.

“There’s a clear correct choice here,” Rivera says. “You can whine about it all you want, but it’s the reality of things.” He huffs out a breath through his nose. “I’m going to tell you a story, Shinsou,” he says, his eyes narrowing. “I think it’ll help to put things in perspective for you.”

Shinsou shrugs, his face still painted with the same annoyed indifference. Izuku swallows. He feels sick to his stomach.

“The last time that the Gekkeiju set their eyes on a student of this school, it was Neito Monoma,” Rivera says, and Izuku feels something cold as ice gather in his stomach. “I’m sure you’ve heard about what happened at the summer training camp.”

“I have,” Shinsou says, his brows lowering slightly, his eyes narrowing.

“Midoriya allowed himself to be captured in Monoma’s place, as you’re already aware,” Rivera says. “What you probably don’t know is that Midoriya, as the vigilante Ace, was forced to join the Gekkeiju in order to avoid being killed by them.” Rivera’s eyes slide over to Izuku lingering there for a moment. “He has since been acting as an undercover operative, providing information to UA and to the Commission. He is responsible for the rescue of a civilian child and of Ren Yamauchi,” Rivera says, nodding in Ren’s direction.

“And,” Rivera continues, “he has been tortured multiple times.” He moves his eyes back to Shinsou. “He has been burned. He has been beaten. He has been put under the effects of multiple mental quirks.” Rivera watches him with a cool gaze. “He does not have the luxury of negotiating the terms of his membership with the Gekkeiju. Other members of similar rank are, from what we understand, paid well and treated well.” Beside Rivera, Koizumi nods.

“One of the villains Ace himself captured before he started at UA was a member of the Gekkeiju,” Koizumi says, leaning forward, a smile on her face. “He’s been questioned extensively, and it looks like he’s never once been mistreated or had his pay denied by the Gekkeiju. He was apparently quite happy with his place there,” she says, nodding. Izuku blinks. He thinks he knows who she’s talking about, the man with green hair and the teleportation type quirk. Izuku still remembers the child he was trying to take, the little girl that Izuku saved. *He was in the Gekkeiju*, Izuku thinks, swallowing uneasily.

“You were right when you said there really isn’t much of a choice,” Shinsou says, his voice dry. His nose wrinkled, his lip curling up at the edge as he looks over to Izuku and Haruta. “So, this is what the two of you have been up to,” he says, his voice a hiss. “I should have known from the beginning that you were only going to see me for my quirk.” He sounds so angry, so raw and upset, that Izuku feels like he’s been punched. It sucks the air out of him, crushes his heart.

“I-I didn’t--I really wanted to--wanted to be your friend,” Izuku says, swallowing. “It wasn’t--I don’t care about your quirk.”

“As if I’d believe that now,” Shinsou hisses under his breath. His eyes move to Haruta. “And *you*,” he snarls, his face twisting. “Was all of that training just to learn more about my quirk? About

how *useful* it could be?” He shakes his head, shutting his eyes for a moment before he opens them again, anger blazing in his gaze. “If Midoriya was kidnapped and forced, then what the hell happened to you? Did you do this shit willingly?”

Haruta opens his mouth, closing it again and shaking his head, his body shaking. Izuku can see the regret, the guilt on his face. It’s Aizawa who answers Shinsou’s question.

“Haruta was kidnapped from his home the summer before,” Aizawa says. “He was coerced into joining under the threat of his sister being killed.” Aizawa’s eyes are dark. “He’s in the same situation as Midoriya.”

Izuku swallows, glancing back over to Shinsou. His face is dark with anger, his brows twitching for a moment before he shakes his head firmly, his lips curling up.

“He can read *minds*,” Shinsou says, his voice low and angry. “It’s not the same. What he’s been doing, what he’s been telling the Gekkeiju, that’s why I’m in this mess, isn’t it?” He turns his eyes to Izuku. “That’s why Midoriya’s in it, too. Haruta’s the traitor. He’s the one who told them where to attack the camp, who told them about me.” He shakes his head again, before looking at Haruta.

“You did this to me,” he spits. “And you did this shit to Midoriya, too. It’s a good thing you aren’t trying to be a hero, because you wouldn’t get very far if this is what you’ve managed as a high schooler.” Shinsou’s eyes move to Izuku.

“And you *knew*,” Shinsou says, gritting his teeth. “You knew, and you lied to me. You didn’t warn me, didn’t do anything to stop this from happening to me.” He pauses, blinking. “You--you kept this secret, didn’t you? When everything changed after you showed up with Mouse and her,” he waves a hand at Ren, “when Aizawa started acting different and you stopped going to training, that’s when UA found out.” Shinsou grits his teeth. “Did you even *try* to stop this from happening? Or did you just roll over and let it, so that you could be the hero?”

“I--” Izuku starts, but the second he does, he feels Shinsou’s quirk wash over him.

“Shut up!” Shinsou shouts, standing up from his seat. “I thought you were my *friend*,” he snarls, baring his teeth. He turns to look at Rivera. “I’ll join them,” Shinsou says, his voice a low growl. “But it’s for my own sake, not for yours.” Izuku feels the grip of Shinsou’s quirk loosen on him, letting him go, but he doesn’t try to speak again. He doesn’t want to.

“This isn’t very heroic behavior,” Rivera says, his face flat and his tone dry. “We can discuss this in more detail when you’ve calmed down,” he says, sighing. He raises a hand to massage his temple. “You’re dismissed.”

“Rivera--” Aizawa starts, but he stops when Shinsou turns, storming out of the room. The door slams shut behind him, and Izuku flinches, hard. He feels shaky and his throat is tight, like he’s going to cry.

“Can--can I go t-too?” Izuku asks, and he hates how wet his voice sounds, how weak. Izuku looks at Aizawa, who exchanges a glance with Nezu.

“You can go,” Rivera says, answering before either of the UA staff can answer. “Kojima can too.” He sighs, leaning his head down. “I don’t have the patience to deal with children right now.”

Izuku nods shakily, standing up from his chair and turning, walking quickly. He can tell that Aizawa wants to say something, wants to protest, but Izuku doesn’t want to hear it. He doesn’t want to be comforted, doesn’t want to be told it’s alright. As he runs from the room, tears starting

to build in his eyes, he knows that everything Shinsou said was true, was correct. Izuku deserves the pain he feels right now.

--

The rest of the day passes in a blur. Izuku knows that his friends are packing up to leave for the break, that Aizawa's busy with Rivera and with parents coming to the school to pick up his classmates, but all Izuku can think is that Aizawa hasn't checked on Izuku because he knows that Izuku deserves what Shinsou said. That Aizawa knows Shinsou is right.

Izuku knows that he should be saying goodbye to his friends, that he should be eating one of the cookies that Satou made, that he should be helping his friends pack. He knows that he should be smiling and laughing and cracking jokes. He knows that he'll regret not seeing them one last time before they leave for the break, but he can't bring himself to go downstairs, not until the chance to see his classmates has long since passed, not until the moon has risen high in the sky and his room is streaked with dark shadows and pale starlight.

Izuku gets up from his bed. He moves slowly, his feet dragging in his rug, the fibers of soft fake-fur moving between his toes. He kneels down in the entrance to his closet, reaches into the box that sits there. He takes out one of his sharpest blades, and he stashes it in the pockets of his sweats.

Izuku moves like he's a puppet, pulled by strings that he can't see. The wooden flooring is cool under his bare feet, and the hallway and stairs are dark and quiet. Izuku hadn't realized how much ambient noise his classmates made, even this time of night. He hadn't realized how much he would miss them, even when they'd only just left. He doesn't think he's really been close to any of them, though, not in a while.

As Izuku walks through the empty, silent common room, he smells the vanilla and brown sugar from Satou's baking. He sees a plate with a few cookies still stacked on it, set on the coffee table between the couches. Izuku swallows around the lump in his throat. He moves through the common room like a ghost, silent and cold. When he pushes open the door to the outside, it's cold enough that his skin prickles with goosebumps, that he shivers. Izuku ignores the pain of the icy concrete on the bottoms of his feet. He shuts the door behind him.

Izuku has never had friends. Not like this, not like he does now. When he was in elementary school, in middle school, his only friend was his bully. He was alone. He was the kid that nobody played with, the kid picked last for the sports teams. He was the kid who cried to himself in bed, smothering the sounds with a blanket pressed to his mouth. He was alone.

And now, in UA, Izuku has so many people. He has Kacchan and Neito and Todoroki and Haruta, and he *had* Shinsou. He has adults, too, more than just his mom, but the thing is that Izuku's never had them before now. He's never had a chance to figure out what *he* did to other people, how he affected them.

I ruined Shinsou's life, Izuku thinks as he steps off of the last stair from the dorm. The moon is high above his head, and his body shakes with shivers as the cold breeze brushes against his skin. The pine needles on the ground slide under his feet as he steps into the forest, the air growing colder in the shade of the trees.

I did that to him, Izuku thinks, imagining Shinsou's face, his lips curled and his eyes bright with anger. He thinks of the hatred, the disgust and fear in Shinsou's face. Rocks and pieces of pinecones dig into the soles of his feet, but Izuku doesn't care. He breathes in the sharp, piney scent of the forest, picking up his pace slightly.

Izuku knows that he's had chances. He knows that people have been reaching out to him, every step of the way, offering to help. It's not that he's not aware, not that he doesn't notice when people ask him if he's alright, say that he can tell them anything, tell him that they want to help. It's just, Izuku hasn't ever considered his life something that valuable. Not since he got his quirk, not since he got another chance. He's always thought, *if it'll kill me, that's fine*. He didn't think about what would happen to the people he was close to. He didn't think that there were things that could happen that were worse than his death.

Izuku sits down under a tall, weathered pine. Its bark is a deep, rich brown, with long, nearly black cracks running between the chunks of dark brown material. The ground underneath it is cold but dry, the pine needles soft and slick underneath him. Izuku rolls up his sleeves, and as he does, a few flakes of pale, fluffy snow drift down from above. Izuku looks up, sees snow falling gently from the sky, catching on the leaves and branches of the tree above him. A few flakes slip through.

Izuku digs his knife into his arms. He slices himself from elbow to wrist, so deep that he's not sure he'll be awake long enough to do the second arm, but he is. He drops his knife and leans back against the pine as everything starts to fade away, sensation bleeding out of him as the blood pours from his arms. He watches the snow fall as black prickles around the edges of his vision, and he thinks, faintly, that he doesn't really want to wake up.

Chapter End Notes

content warning: suicide, panic attacks, nausea, self harm

[discord!](#) [carrrd!](#)

i hope you enjoyed!!!! pog for me this weekend gamers

meeting

Chapter Summary

last time: izuku is upsetti, they tell shinsou who is ANGY, izuku kms's in the snow

Chapter Notes

besties how do u come up with chapter titles

also sorry dis one is late i was meal prepping all day B)

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

When Izuku wakes up, he is cold and he is still. He feels the chill before anything else, before he opens his eyes or moves from his spot on the forest floor--it feels like he's been dipped in ice, like he's been out for hours. He isn't shivering, but he thinks he should be, and when he opens his eyes, a few fluffy snowflakes cling to his eyelashes.

The forest is dark, with the moonlight seeping through the tree branches up ahead, but Izuku can still see the thin layer of snow that covers him. He looks like a part of the forest, like this, dusted in white the same way that the trees and the stones are. He sits like that for a moment, blinking away half-melted snow, before he registers *when* he's woken up. His sleeves are rolled up, and beside him, on the ground, is a knife, and for a moment he wonders if he'd reset at all, but a quick glance around rules that out. There's no blood.

Izuku feels stiff and sore when he tries to move, reaching a hand out and picking up his knife. The flakes of snow that had fallen on top of it melt under his body heat, and Izuku grimaces at the dampness on his hand. The knife is cold as ice as Izuku picks it up, shoving it in the front pocket of his hoodie. The motion reminds him of when he went to the tower, when he rescued Mouse, and it's so visceral, so real that he jerks his hand out of his pocket, his breathing picking up and catching in his throat. Izuku leans forward, clutching his hands to his chest for a moment as he catches his breath, eyes wide.

He stares at the snow collecting slowly on the ground, fat white flakes that drift lazily from above. They glimmer even in the darkness, lit from above by the stars, and Izuku thinks it might be beautiful if he felt like himself. Instead, he just feels dizzy, out of place. He thinks that it might be from the cold, might be from the snow melting into his hoodie and pants. His feet have gone completely numb, and when he looks down at them, they're bright red from the cold. He wiggles his toes, wincing at the burning pain that lances through them, and he decides that he needs to get up. He needs to leave the woods, or he'll die again soon.

Izuku gets to his feet slowly, using the tree he'd been leaned up against for balance. The snow falls away from him, mostly, but there's still a thin layer of partly melted snow sticking to his front. His backside feels mostly dry, thankfully, and Izuku remembers that it hadn't been snowing when he first came here. He wonders how long he was asleep, before he wakes up, and he realizes slowly that he's never had a delay in his resets and waking up before. He always wakes up *earlier* than

when he'd died, not later. Izuku feels a pang of nerves in his stomach that makes him want to sit back down and cut his wrists open again, but he ignores it.

Walking through the forest takes far, far longer than it should. Izuku knows that the longer he's out here, the worse it'll get, but he can't bring himself to worry about it, can't bring himself to feel any kind of fear. His feet hurt as he drags them along the ground, but other than that, he mostly feels cold and numb. Izuku's aware, of course, of the snow melting into his clothes and soaking him, of the fact that his sleeves are still rolled up, but he doesn't really think much of it. Izuku trudges forward, in the direction of the school, listening to the shuffle-crunch of his bare feet on the cold, snowy forest floor.

When Izuku steps out of the forest and into the cleared area, the thin strip of lawn between the woods and the concrete steps to the dorm, he sees Aizawa almost immediately. His teacher is wearing his hero costume, his capture scarf fluttering around him and his hair loose at his shoulders, and the moonlight paints him in greyscale. Izuku can see the exact moment that Aizawa spots him, his teacher starting, then hurrying down the stairs. He's wearing heavy boots, and Izuku can only think that he's jealous. *I should have put on shoes, first*, he thinks to himself.

"Midoriya!" Aizawa shouts, his voice thick with something that might be panic, might be anger. Izuku isn't sure. "What are you doing out here?" he asks, his voice growing quieter as he stops in front of Izuku, looking him up and down. "You're soaking wet."

Izuku blinks, feeling confused. "I..." He wets his lips with the tip of his tongue, his face feeling numb. "I needed some air," he says, absently. Aizawa frowns, reaching out a hand to press it to Izuku's forehead.

"Shit," Aizawa curses under his breath. "You're freezing. I'm going to get you inside." He presses a hand between Izuku's shoulder blades, nudging him towards the stairs. Izuku stumbles forward with the touch, feeling lost, but he lets Aizawa guide him up the stairs and back into the building. The wave of heat that washes over him when he steps inside feels suffocating, almost. It stings the skin on his cheeks and makes his hands and feet prickle with burning pain.

Izuku thinks that he loses a few moments of time, then, because one moment, Aizawa is examining his forearms, and the next, he's wrapping Izuku up in a huge, fluffy towel. Izuku blinks, feeling dazed as Aizawa ruffles the towel through Izuku's damp hair.

"Midoriya," Aizawa says, his voice firm and low. "Why were you outside? You didn't have a mission tonight." He wraps the towel around Izuku, holding the ends together in front of Izuku. Slowly, Izuku reaches up and grabs them, holding the towel to his body.

"I-I needed some air," Izuku says, squeezing his fingers in the fluffy material of the towel. His fingers sting.

"You--" Aizawa cuts himself off, shaking his head. His brows are furrowed as he stares at Izuku. "You're lucky it's not any colder out," he says, reaching forward and taking one of Izuku's hands. "You don't have any frostbite," he says as he examines Izuku's fingers, before releasing them with a sigh. Izuku blinks, raising that hand up to look at it.

"What--what happened with Shinsou?" Izuku asks, and he thinks he's starting to come back to himself, starting to feel real and awake again. Aizawa sighs, putting a hand on Izuku's shoulder and leading him over to one of the couches.

"Sit," Aizawa says, turning and walking into the kitchen area as Izuku sits gingerly on the couch. "I'll make you some soup and hot chocolate. You need to get warmed up." He flicks on a light, and

Izuku winces, squinting as his eyes adjust.

“S-Sorry that I--that I scared you,” Izuku says, because he really hadn’t intended to freak Aizawa out. He hears his teacher grunt from the kitchen as he takes out a kettle and a pot, setting them both on the stove.

“It’s fine, so long as you don’t do something like that again,” Aizawa says, pouring water from a pitcher into the kettle. “I should have checked on you sooner.” Izuku swallows.

“It’s--it’s okay,” he says. “Um. How are Haruta and--and Shinsou?” he twists his fingers in the fabric of the towel, feeling the small fibers move between the pads of his forefinger and thumb.

“Shinsou’s angry,” Aizawa says. “But he’ll be okay.” He sighs, turning on the stove beneath the kettle. “As for Haruta, the first thing he said when I went to check on him was that I needed to go check on you, first,” Aizawa says, turning to glance over at Izuku with narrowed eyes. “Mind telling me why he’d say that?”

“I was--I was pretty, um, upset,” Izuku says lamely, his face twisting into a frown. Aizawa sighs, nodding.

“Next time you’re so upset that you feel the need to go out barefoot in the snow, call me,” Aizawa says, his eyes still fixed on Izuku’s. “I’m sorry that I didn’t come to check on you sooner.” He pauses, his lips twitching downward slightly. “I mistakenly thought that you would seek out a friend, in this situation.”

Izuku blinks. “E-Everyone’s--they’ve all gone home,” he says, confused. Aizawa frowns.

“Todoroki and Bakugou are still here,” Aizawa says, his brows furrowed. “You didn’t know? Todoroki’s leaving tomorrow morning, and Bakugou’s parents get back from a business trip on Monday.” He shakes his head a small bit, still frowning. “I’m surprised they didn’t tell you.”

Izuku swallows. “I didn’t... I didn’t really give them the chance to.” He folds his hands together in his lap. “I’ve--I’ve been in my room since we got out of the meeting.”

Aizawa nods. “I should have expected as much,” he says, sighing. Izuku watches him moving about in the kitchen, watches him open up a can of soup and dump it into the pot. Izuku tugs the towel together around himself.

“I’m sorry that I--that I didn’t um, talk to anyone,” Izuku says. “I know that you n-needed to be with Shinsou.” He swallows, glancing down at the floor. “I should be able to--to handle this.”

“Midoriya,” Aizawa says, his voice low. “Look at me.” Izuku swallows, glancing up at his teacher. His face is dark, serious. Izuku thinks it might even be a little sad.

“You can always talk to me. Even If I’m busy with another student, you can *always* come to me.” Aizawa sighs, reaching up to run a hand through his hair. “I’d much rather that you came to me rather than you--you going out in the cold like that.”

“R-Right,” Izuku says, taking a deep breath in. “Okay,” he says, shutting his eyes for a moment. He listens to Aizawa moving around in the kitchen as his body slowly warms up.

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When Izuku sees Shinsou next, it’s in the morning. Haruta is already standing beside Izuku, looking like he wants to throw up as the two of them wait at the gate that leads out of the UA

campus. Izuku glances over to Haruta, watches as Haruta chews at his lower lip.

“You--you killed yourself last night,” Haruta whispers, his voice quiet. Izuku swallows. He looks away from Haruta, and even though he doesn’t answer, he knows that Haruta knows he’s right.

“Shinsou should--should be here soon,” Izuku says, moving his gaze down to the ground. His mouth is dry. “He’s--he needs us to be strong right now.” *So I can’t talk about this right now*, he thinks, without meaning to. Izuku bites at his lower lip, his skin feeling itchy and hot. He wants to claw at himself, wants to slice his arms open, but he can’t, not here. He needs to make this easier on Shinsou, as much as he can.

“Okay,” Haruta says, his voice low. Izuku can tell from his tone that he wants to talk about it more, wants to say something, but he doesn’t. Izuku suspects that it’s because Shinsou is approaching, walking down the sidewalk with his hands in the pockets of his jeans and his coat half-unzipped over his hoodie. There’s a scowl on his face, and as Izuku watches him grow closer, he sees Haruta flinch. Izuku swallows, both wanting to know what Shinsou’s thinking and not wanting to know at all.

“Shinsou,” Izuku says, his voice tight and nervous. “Um, are you--are you ready?” Izuku shifts back and forth on his feet, watching Shinsou’s eyes narrow.

“No,” Shinsou says, his voice dry. “I won’t be ready to become a villain *ever*, actually, but thanks to the two of you, it looks like it’s happening today.” Izuku swallows, nods. He’s not sure how he’s going to make it to the tower if this is how he feels just being near Shinsou. He knows Haruta must be having it even worse than he is, being able to hear what Shinsou’s thinking directly.

“We should, um, we should get going,” Izuku says. Shinsou snorts, rolling his eyes as he starts to walk forward, moving between Izuku and Haruta, out into the city.

“Sure,” Shinsou says. “Walk me to my death.” Izuku swallows, exchanging a glance with Haruta before they start off after Shinsou, headed towards the train station.

The journey to the tower is quiet. Slow. Shinsou doesn’t ask them anything, doesn’t say anything about what he’s about to face. Izuku wants to talk, wants to warn him that he should ask to work with Manami and not Miura or Fury, wants to tell him about Sasaki’s quirk and about what he should do to be careful, how he should stop himself from getting hurt, but Izuku doesn’t dare break the silence. Instead of talking, he thinks.

Izuku thinks about how he’ll kill himself when he gets back from the tower tonight or tomorrow. It’ll only be fair, after all--Izuku’s putting Shinsou through the same thing that he has nightmares about, the same thing that’s destroyed him. Izuku thinks that, maybe, he should try something painful, something miserable. He remembers that hanging was unpleasant, that it was quick and that he knows he won’t get caught, but he’s not sure that it’s enough. He knows that slitting his wrists isn’t right, that it’s not going to help. He knows that, if he does something that makes him feel *better* and not worse, that he’s going to end up feeling even more guilty. It wouldn’t work, not as a punishment.

Izuku thinks about poison as they step off of the train. He wonders if he takes his sleeping pills, maybe a few painkillers, he could kill himself in a way that hurts. He hadn’t really minded being high, before, but he knows that some of the painkillers he can get at the store should make his stomach bleed, might make his liver fail. He’d read that, when he was coming up with his list of methods to try when he trained his quirk. It’d be suitably painful, and if it doesn’t kill Izuku, then he can slit his wrists to finish the job.

Of course, Izuku thinks that it might work out even better if he combined a few methods. He knows that he could do a lot of things without necessarily *dying* , but if he combined a few, they might kill him together, and they'd be more painful. Izuku wonders if he'd be able to get away with sneaking out into the snow again, if he could take some pills and then die slowly, painfully. He thinks that the snow would make it less pleasant, but he thinks that he might actually like the idea of dying slowly in the forest. It's alone and quiet, and Izuku could take his time, use methods that might make enough noise that he couldn't get away with them in the dorm.

"Midoriya," Haruta hisses. "Shut *up* ," he growls, turning to look at Izuku with fire in his blue eyes. Izuku blinks, freezing. They'd been walking out of the train station, starting on the first block between the station and the tower. Now, they're stopped in the middle of the sidewalk, Haruta's lips curled back in a snarl as he glares at Izuku, and Shinsou's staring at the two of them with surprise on his face, his eyes wide.

"I-I didn't--" Izuku cuts himself off before he says that he hadn't said anything. "I'm sorry Haruta, I didn't mean--"

"I don't care if you meant to upset me or not," Haruta says. "Stop thinking about that, at least where I can hear it," he snaps, turning his head and starting off in the direction of the tower. Izuku swallows. He knows that Haruta can tell he's apologetic, so he doesn't apologize again out loud. He's not sure what the point would be.

"I've never seen him pissed off like that before," Shinsou says, and when Izuku looks over to him, there's a nasty look on his face. "Guess it's hard for you to lie to someone who can read minds," he says, before starting after Haruta. Izuku takes in a deep breath, hurrying after the two of them, and he knows he has to distract himself or he'll start crying, start thinking about what Haruta *just* asked him not to think about.

"When you--when you join," Izuku starts with a shaky voice, "you'll want to work for Manami. She's--she's not *good* , necessarily, but she won't hurt you on p-purpose," he says, keeping his gaze trained on the ground. "It's also a g-good idea to be polite to Fury, even if he--if he's provoking you. He's the one who's mostly likely to h-hurt you, but--but Sasaki will too. And don't--don't say her name in the compound, just call her boss." Izuku remembers, suddenly when he'd first met her. "Be polite, to her, like--like you should introduce yourself, bow. It'll help, I-I think."

"Why are you telling me this?" Shinsou asks, his voice slow and wary, like he doesn't want to ask Izuku the question at all. Izuku swallows.

"I want to---to help you," Izuku says, and he's not surprised when he feels Shinsou's quirk wash over him, making him stop walking and stand still, staring straight ahead.

"Yeah, like I'd believe that," Shinsou says. "Tell me what you were think--"

"Shinsou, don't," Haruta says, cutting him off. Izuku can't move his eyes to see how Shinsou reacts, but he can hear the huff of annoyance.

"Covering for your buddy?" Shinsou asks, his tone mocking. "Whatever," he says, releasing his hold on Izuku. "It's not like I'm going to hear anything I don't already know." He starts walking, and Izuku doesn't hesitate to follow after him. He swallows, taking a deep breath.

"Sasaki's quirk is called, um, Imposition," Izuku says, chewing at his lower lip as Shinsou shoots him a glance. "She can i-inflict experiences she's had on people near her, although I don't--I don't know her range," he explains. "It's not permanent, though, so she can't--she can't kill people

directly.”

“The Commission briefed me on their quirks,” Shinsou says. “Said that most of the information was from you, so thanks for that, I guess.” His tone is dry, sarcastic. Izuku forces himself not to cringe at it. *I deserve this, and more.*

“She’ll use a gun if she needs to take you out,” Izuku says. “Manami will--she’d ask you how you wanted to die, and you could--you could take advantage of that to ask her a question. She’s, um, high most of the time, so you could probably get away with it.” He swallows. “I don’t think that--that Miura would kill you, but if--if she tries to, you should--you should ask her about Ren,” he says. “Fury, he--he only really tortures, I think. He’d rather--rather keep someone alive and have them suffer, so if you can last that long.” Izuku can feel his heartbeat coming quickly in his chest, but he doesn’t let himself focus on it.

“Fury stops sooner if you beg him,” Haruta says, quietly. “If you--if you cry a lot, and tell him you can’t take it. He’ll tell you that you’re useless a-and weak, but he’ll stop using his quirk, usually,” Haruta says. Izuku blinks, glancing up at the second year. Haruta’s head is held high, but Izuku can see his hands shaking at his sides.

“Why would you let this happen to me if you know how bad it is?” Shinsou asks, and Izuku can’t read his tone, can’t read his blank face even the tiniest bit. Izuku wants this to be a sign that Shinsou’s considering forgiving him, but at the same time, he doesn’t really want Shinsou to let it go.

“I didn’t--I couldn’t think of any other way,” Izuku says, staring at the ground instead of at Shinsou. “I-I tried a lot of--a lot of stuff, but it didn’t... I didn’t know this was happening until it was too late to stop it,” Izuku says. He feels something heavy in his gut, like a ball of lead. He wonders, if he killed himself enough, he’d be allowed to turn time back to when Haruta and Ema and Maka first started training with them, far enough back to stop Shinsou from becoming a target to the Gekkeiju at all.

“The sports festival,” Haruta says, quietly. Izuku blinks, looking over to him. “That’s when the Gekkeiju started working to get you, Shinsou.” Haruta sighs, looking at the ground. “You did such a good job of standing out that--that the Gekkeiju wanted you too, not just Aizawa.”

“Are you saying this is my fault?” Shinsou snaps back harshly. Haruta doesn’t even hesitate before answering.

“No, I’m not,” Haruta says. “You know--you know perfectly well what I mean,” he says, his voice laced with something that might be irritation. The three of them turn the corner, and the Gekkeiju tower is in front of them. Izuku swallows. If he’d felt like an executioner in the room at UA, waiting for Shinsou to arrive, it doesn’t compare to how he feels now.

“This is--this is the place,” Izuku says, staring up at the tower. “It’s--it’s time,” he says, feeling sick to his stomach. Shinsou seems to feel much the same, judging by the look that crosses briefly over his face before his mask of subtle annoyance forms.

“Let’s get this over with,” Shinsou says, sighing, and Izuku nods, stepping up to the door and tugging it open. Haruta steps in first, then Shinsou. Izuku steps in after him, the door shutting behind him.

Yamamoto is behind the desk as usual, but when the three of them walk in, she startles, jumping slightly in her seat. She glances up from the computer, blinking dark eyes at them.

“Already?” she asks, her eyes fixed on Shinsou. “That was quick,” she comments. “The boss will be pleased.” She looks back to her computer, typing quickly on the keyboard.

“Can we--can we meet with her directly?” Izuku asks, taking a steadying breath. Yamamoto nods without looking up from the computer, clicking something with her mouse.

“Seventh floor, first door on the left,” Yamamoto says, a hint of a smile on her face. Izuku nods, looking over to meet Haruta’s eyes briefly before they start towards the elevators.

“Who’s she?” Shinsou asks quietly, his voice barely above a whisper as Izuku presses the elevator call button.

“Yamamoto,” Izuku replies at the same volume. Shinsou nods, and Izuku can see his throat bobbing as he swallows. The elevator doors open, and Izuku and Haruta step on, closely followed by Shinsou. Izuku feels the familiar swell of anxiety in his chest as the elevator doors slide shut, Haruta leaning forward to press the button for the seventh floor.

Izuku counts to ten in his head, then back down to one. He repeats it a few times, counting up and down until the elevator dings, the doors sliding open once again. He doesn’t want to think of something that would make it more difficult for Haruta, that would hurt him, but at the same time, it’s hard not to. Izuku thinks that his body must be burning under all the stress, the anxiety making him shaky and sweaty under his coat and dress shirt. He leads the way as he steps out of the elevator, onto the seventh floor.

He doesn’t waste any time, walking to the first door on the left. The door is shut, but he can see light in the window and underneath the door, brighter than the ambient light in the hallway. He breathes, in and out, before he knocks on the door. It feels strange, to do this with Haruta at his side and Shinsou just behind him, but he pushes forward.

“Come in,” Sasaki answers, her voice warm and happy. Izuku takes a deep breath before reaching down and twisting the doorknob, opening the door and stepping inside. It’s exactly how he remembers it, with the leather couch facing them and the ottoman that Izuku’s sat on before, been killed on before. Sasaki is sitting on the couch, wearing a long, short sleeved black dress, her legs crossed over each other and her arms crossed over her chest.

Izuku bows a tiny bit to Sasaki before stepping inside, moving to sit on the far side of the ottoman. As much as he wants to help Shinsou, he doesn’t want to risk angering Sasaki and making this worse for him. He watches quietly as Haruta steps in, copying Izuku’s little bow before joining him on the ottoman. Shinsou steps into the room, pulling the door shut beside him before bowing, staying bowed as he speaks.

“My name is Hitoshi Shinsou,” he says, his tone flat and unreadable. “Thank you for having me,” he says, before straightening up. Sasaki’s lips quirk up in a smile, her bright green eyes narrowing.

“Have a seat, Shinsou,” she says, gesturing to the ottoman. “My name is Maiko Sasaki, but I imagine that Midoriya and Haruta have already told you about me, hmm?” She grins, her eyes tracking Shinsou as he moves, sitting on the ottoman. “I must say, it’s a nice change to have someone come in so easily.” She leans forward, uncrossing her arms and lacing her fingers together, resting her interlocked hands on her knees.

“I was under the impression that it was come in willingly or get dragged,” Shinsou says, shrugging, and Izuku has to bite the tip of his tongue to keep from reacting. *Is he going to give us away?*

Sasaki laughs, tipping her head back slightly. "You're a smart one, aren't you? Or did one of my boys tell you how they came to work for us?" She tips her head to the side slightly.

"Haruta's a bad liar," Shinsou says, his tone bored. "And I know Midoriya wouldn't join something like this group without pressure." He leans forward, leaning his elbows on his knees. "I don't intend on working for free, though." Izuku swallows, looking between Sasaki and Shinsou as they stare at each other.

"Of course not," Sasaki purrs, her tongue coming out to lick her bottom lip. "We can negotiate pay and accommodations, if you'd like," she says, reaching behind her. Izuku flinches, expecting a gun, but instead, she pulls out an envelope, sliding it across the table to Shinsou. "This is our starting offer."

Izuku watches Shinsou reach forward, picking up the envelope and opening it, tearing through the paper. He pulls out a folded sheet from inside, his eyes widening as he reads whatever is written on it. He glances up to Sasaki, blinking, and Sasaki laughs, raising a hand to cover her mouth as she giggles.

"Is that satisfactory?" she asks, and Shinsou nods quickly, folding the paper back up and sliding it inside the envelope before shoving it in his coat pocket.

"Y-Yeah," Shinsou says, his cool exterior seemingly busted through. Sasaki seems amused, leaning forward as her eyes narrow.

"Haruta, dear," she says, her eyes moving to the boy. "I'd like you to head downstairs," she says. "Kazuo has been asking for you, you see." Her gaze is sharp, and Izuku remembers what Haruta's told him before; Haruta's not allowed to spend much time around Sasaki. Haruta seems unsurprised, standing up and giving her a quick bow.

"Yes ma'am," he says, his voice small, scared. "I-I'll go to him right away," Haruta says, before turning and marching quickly out of the room. Sasaki seems to wait a moment, before she seems to relax, her smile widening.

"There we go," she says, grinning wide enough that her eyes crease at the bottoms. "It's much nicer to not have to guard your thoughts, isn't it?" She reaches up and tucks a lock of black hair behind a horn. "I would imagine that it's particularly difficult for you, Shinsou. If I were you, I think I'd be pretty angry with Haruta." She laughs, shrugging. "I can't speak for the two of you, but it's kind of Haruta's fault that either of you are here at all, isn't it?"

"Why would I be angry with him?" Shinsou asks, raising an eyebrow. "He got me a job, essentially," he says, and Izuku's surprised at the absolute lack of anger on his face. Sasaki laughs, tipping her head back.

"Fair enough!" she says, seemingly delighted as she leans forward. "Midoriya, you have good reason to hate Haruta, although frankly I don't think you have it in you," she says, her eyes narrowed. "How are you liking working with Manami? She said she upset you, last time."

Izuku swallows. "Um, her quirk, it--it freaked me out a little," he says, looking at the coffee table instead of at Sasaki. He hears her hum.

"Ah, but her quirk only amplifies emotions," she says. "So, what had you so nervous in the first place?" She clicks her tongue. "Surely you're not that bothered by being assigned missions?"

"She--" Izuku starts, clenching his teeth together. "She reminds me of Fury," he says, his voice

sticking in his throat. It's a half truth, but it's still painful to say, and he feels a little sick to his stomach. It gets worse when he hears Sasaki snicker under her breath.

"Kazuo's really scared you and Haruta, hasn't he?" Sasaki asks, and when Izuku looks up, her head is tilted slightly to the side, a light smile on her face. "It's a shame how timid he makes people, but the obedience is nice," she says, shrugging. Her tone is light, like she's talking about the differences in two toys, not in people. It makes Izuku's chest prickle with fear that he pushes down.

"Shinsou," Sasaki says, her eyes moving to him. "How would you like to work under me directly?" she asks, tipping her head to the side slightly and pressing the tip of her index finger to her lower lip. "It's a bit unconventional, but if I'm being honest with you, I'm not sure I want you working with any of my lieutenants." Izuku swallows, glancing over to Shinsou, who tilts his head to the side, raising an eyebrow.

"Why not?" he asks. Sasaki grins, her tongue coming up and swiping over one of her teeth.

"I don't think you'd get along well with Kazuo or Sumire," Sasaki says. "And I don't think you'd like the combination of your quirk with Manami's." She tips her head to the side. "Are you familiar with what Fanaticism does?"

"Fanaticism?" Shinsou asks. "I've been told what her quirk does, but not its name," he says. Sasaki nods, seeming unsurprised.

"A multiplier on both emotion and physical strength," Sasaki says, sighing as she smiles. "It amplifies quirks too, of course. They *are* physical abilities, after all." She tips her head to the side slightly. "Your quirk, like mine, has backlash," she says. "Manami's quirk not only strengthens the nice, behaved aspects of a quirk, but also the backlash." Her eyes move to the side, to Izuku. "It's interesting. Midoriya has quirk backlash that's quite severe, according to Haruta, but he's never seemed to get sick from being put under Manami's quirk. It makes me question what, exactly, qualifies as *mortal* dangers for him." Her eyes narrow as she smiles, and Izuku freezes, clenching his teeth together and hoping that his reaction isn't too obvious.

"Both Midoriya and I have to choose to activate our quirks," Shinsou says. Sasaki nods, her eyes moving back over to him.

"Ah, see, that makes sense for Midoriya," she says, leaning forward. "But you establish a connection after a response to a question, don't you? That's part of your quirk, even if you don't activate the brainwashing." She grins. "Your quirk, in essence, reaches out and touches another person's brain. It's your choice whether to grab it or not." She chuckles. "Mine's the same way. If you're in my range, you're technically *always* being affected by my quirk. Most of the time, I'm simply choosing not to impose anything," she says with a shrug.

"I guess that's one way to look at it," Shinsou says, his voice impassive. Sasaki relaxes against the back of the couch, her eyes sliding over to Izuku.

"You may go, Shinsou," Sasaki says. "I'll let Midoriya or Haruta know when your room and supplies are ready, and you can come back at that time for a tour and some training." Her eyes narrow as she smiles wide enough to show her teeth. "I have some business with Midoriya that would be best done with just the two of us."

Izuku swallows, feeling cold ice run down his spine. Shinsou glances back at him as Shinsou stands up, walking to the door. Izuku can't tell if Shinsou's worried about him, can't tell if Shinsou even cares. Izuku takes a deep breath the door shuts behind Shinsou, and Izuku turns back to look

at Sasaki, where she's still grinning a wide, predatory smile.

Chapter End Notes

content warning: graphic suicidal thoughts including with drug use, thoughts of self harm

[discord!](#) [carrrd!](#)

i hope u enjoyed!!!! im behind on schoolwork again and it's my own damn fault
LMAO

reconciliation

Chapter Summary

last time: izuku wakes up in da snow. they take the shinsou to the tower and sasaki wants to talk to izuku alone :3c

Chapter Notes

hi this is a little softer than i planned bc i had a shit day and needed the softness

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Izuku feels like he's a bug, pinned under a thick layer of transparent glass as Sasaki watches him for a long moment, her tongue moving over the tips of her too-sharp teeth. Izuku's head hurts from clenching his teeth, from trying to keep his face from showing fear, but he's pretty sure that he's failed completely. Somewhere in the back of Izuku's mind, he keeps thinking that this is it. That Sasaki knows he's betrayed her or what his quirk really is. Izuku doesn't want it to be the case, but he can't think of any other reason she'd want to speak to him specifically.

"Midoriya," Sasaki says, her voice almost a purr. "You've been doing quite well on your missions, lately," she says, drumming her fingers along her knee, through the fabric of her long black dress. "That's why I've decided to tell you about our next big operation." She smiles, her eyes crinkling. "So stop looking like I'm about to bite your head off, okay?"

Izuku swallows. "Your--your next big operation?" he echoes, not sure if he should be relieved or not. He doesn't think that Sasaki is genuinely happy with his performance, but at the same time, he's not sure what she's after.

"Yes," Sasaki says, resting her chin on the palm of one hand. "We've been treating you the same as Haruta, which I don't think is exactly fair," she says, her eyes half lidded. "I mean, you *did* technically join willingly, even if it was only to save yourself."

Izuku blinks, swallowing. He hadn't been sure exactly how much Sasaki knew about *why* he joined, but he'd figured she had *some* idea. It doesn't make him feel any better to hear her say it outloud, though. Izuku waits, knowing she has more to say. She watches him for a moment with her neon green eyes before she chuckles lightly until her breath.

"It wouldn't be fair if we paid Shinsou and not you, would it?" she says, raising her eyebrows. "You're quite devoted to our cause, after all, and because of you, we've been able to acquire a number of... assets." She licks her lips. "It would only be fair to reward someone who's done so much for the Gekkeiju."

"Oh," Izuku says, swallowing. He doesn't like to hear that, doesn't like to know that he's *done so much* for a villain organization that's tortured him, doesn't want to hear that he's helped them *acquire a number of assets*. He hopes that Sasaki's just talking about Shinsou, just exaggerating. He hopes that he hasn't actually been responsible for the kidnapping of children, but he wouldn't

be surprised exactly, if he was. *This is what happens when I work with villains* , he thinks to himself bitterly.

“Yes, so I think I’d like to offer you some more responsibility, and of course, more reward,” Sasaki says, grinning wide enough to show the tips of her long, pointed canines. “It’d only be fair to ask you what you want, of course. I wouldn’t want to give you a reward that means nothing to you,” she says, smiling at him like she’s a friend from school, like she’s a neighbor or something else. Izuku doesn’t know why it’s so unsettling, but he hates the way she looks genuinely friendly, like she’s excited to hear what he wants.

“What I--what I want?” Izuku asks, swallowing. Sasaki nods, her expression still calm and happy.

“Whatever you’d like, Midoriya,” she says. “You’re important to this organization, after all.” Sasaki sighs, an expression of regret passing over her face. “I made a mistake when I put you with Sumire, at first. I should have known that Kazuo would take advantage of the situation.” Sasaki smiles, but it’s bitter, this time. “I didn’t know if I could trust you, then, but now you’ve brought me Shinsou. I know you’re close friends with him,” she says, tilting her head to the side slightly, “so I’m really happy that you’re loyal enough to me to risk your friend going through what you and Haruta did. Risk him hating you, and all that,” Sasaki says, her eyes soft, almost sympathetic.

Izuku swallows. “I can ask for--for anything?” he asks. He knows that he shouldn’t trust Sasaki, not now, that it’s too big of a risk to ask for Miura or Haruta to go free, but he can’t help but wonder if she’d do that for him. She seems genuine, as much as Izuku doesn’t trust her.

“Mm, not *anything* ,” Sasaki says, giving her head a little shake. “I wouldn’t let you take an asset, for example, or give you your own base,” she says, a chuckle in her voice. “Something reasonable, though. Like money, or weapons, or maybe a workshop here. Things like that.”

“Could I--could I ask for information?” Izuku asks, before he can talk himself out of it. Sasaki doesn’t seem surprised in the slightest, though, and the only sign that she’s heard him at all is the slight narrowing of her eyes, the slight stretching of her smile.

“Oh, of course,” Sasaki answers, her voice a low purr. “You’re an interesting person, you know that, Midoriya?” She leans forward, grinning. “You really do surprise me, every time.”

Izuku frowns. “What did--what did you expect me to ask for?” he asks, feeling vaguely unsettled. Sasaki doesn’t seem to notice, or if she does, she finds it amusing, because she giggles under her breath.

“I guess I just thought you’d ask for things to be better for Haruta, instead,” Sasaki says, shrugging. “It’s better this way, since I can’t really ask Kazuo to stop at this point,” she says leaning forward. “I think it’s interesting that you care more about knowledge than you do about your friend, not that I’m judging!” She leans back, raising her hands. “I’m not the type to seek out knowledge so much as share it, but I understand having something more important to you than anything else,” she says, tipping her head to the side. Her grin makes it look more like she’s baring her teeth than anything else.

“I don’t--that’s not--” Izuku starts, feeling his face heat slightly, but Sasaki cuts him off with a wave of her hand.

“You don’t need to try and explain yourself!” she says, her voice light. “Really, I get it.” Her smile makes Izuku’s stomach feel cold and heavy under his ribs. He wants to explain, wants to say *no, I’m not like you* , but he doesn’t want to upset her, either. Doesn’t want to argue with someone who’s killed him so many times.

“O-Okay,” Izuku says instead of arguing. He swallows around the lump in his throat. Sasaki looks delighted, like she can’t tell that Izuku is nervous, guilty, miserable.

“Our next operation is a big one, so listen closely,” she says, lacing her fingers together and letting her hands fall to her lap. “I don’t know if you’d have been informed, but we assisted the League in breaking out Kurogiri,” she says, grinning. Izuku blinks. Rivera had mentioned the information, but it’s different, hearing it from Sasaki. He must look surprised, because Sasaki nods, continuing to speak.

“It was a fairly difficult mission, nothing we couldn’t handle, though. It’s nice to have Kurogiri’s abilities, of course, but the real aim of the mission was something else entirely,” Sasaki says. Her eyes narrow. “I’m sure you’re aware that both Kurogiri and All for One were being kept in Tartarus, yes?”

Izuku nods. “Um, yeah. I don’t--I don’t know who All for One is, though, not--not really,” he says. He fights the urge to squirm in his seat, but Sasaki nods, her expression patient.

“I’m not surprised,” she says, her voice soft and her smile gentle. “He is the man behind the scenes of the League,” she says, tipping her head to the side. “And he has abilities that are rather... interesting.” She grins, the edge of her smile creeping up towards one eye. “He can transfer quirks from one person to another.”

Izuku blinks. “He--he can *what* ?” Izuku asks before he can stop himself, the terror clear in the shake of his voice, in the high pitched tone. Sasaki just grins, nodding slowly.

“I’m sure you can see why someone like me, who’s collecting useful quirks, would be interested in someone who essentially has a library of them,” Sasaki says. “And I’m in a... unique position,” she says, reaching up to tap a finger against her chin. “You see, most people who are given extra quirks end up with mental deficits because of it,” she says. “But with my modifications, I should have no problems receiving additional quirks.” She fluffs up her wings, as if to demonstrate what her modifications are. “It’s a perfect match,” she says, leaning forward and grinning.

“Although,” Sasaki sighs, her smile dropping into a pout. “My plans have had rather poor success rates, so far.” Her eyes move to the side as she sighs, puffing her cheeks out. “All for One had to go and get himself captured before he’d fulfilled his half of the deal that the League made with me and my own people,” Sasaki says, shaking her head. “It’s really a shame. We could have helped them out so much more, if they’d had a little more foresight.” Her eyes slide over to Izuku. “That’s, of course, where you come in.”

“M-Me?” Izuku stammers. Sasaki grins, leaning forward, and Izuku has the sense that, no matter what he says, she’s going to be the one controlling this conversation, guiding it. Her eyes are almost painfully bright to look at, but Izuku can’t make himself look away.

“You,” Sasaki says, a hint of laughter in her voice. “Midoriya, we’re going to break All for One out of jail,” she says, her eyes narrowing and her grin widening, showing every point of her too-sharp teeth. “And you’re going to help.”

--

When Izuku gets back to UA, it’s alone. He knows that Haruta is still at the tower, still in the hands of the villains, but some small part of him had thought that Shinsou might be waiting for him. He’s not sure why, exactly, but he’d hoped nonetheless. That feels stupid now, as he stands in front of the gate, swallowing uneasily.

Campus is too empty and too quiet as he steps through the gate, onto the sidewalk. It's not like it's usually *lively* on the weekends, but Izuku hadn't realized until just now that there was usually *some* sound, some sign of life. Now, it feels like a ghost town, eerie and cold and silent as Izuku walks forward. He knows that, technically, he's probably supposed to go to the infirmary. It's not like he's injured, though, and Aizawa's probably busy with Shinsou, if Izuku has to guess. Izuku stops walking for a moment in the fork of the sidewalk, where it splits off to lead to the infirmary and classroom buildings on one side, with the dorms on the other. He pulls out his phone, biting at his lip as he opens a message from Aizawa from about forty minutes ago, around when Izuku was leaving.

I'm with Shinsou. Text me when you get back + let me know if you need anything, it reads, then in another message below it, *I'd prefer if you weren't alone after what happened last night. It doesn't have to be me.* Izuku swallows. He taps on his screen, pulling up the keyboard to reply to his teacher.

I'm back, Izuku sends, then, *Is Kacchan still on campus?* Izuku would honestly rather have Neito, right now, but he knows Neito's gone home and that he'd come back to campus and leave his family behind in a heartbeat if he thought that Izuku was going to hurt himself, and Izuku doesn't want to do that to him, doesn't want to ask that of him. Kacchan might demand answers, but he's already here, at least.

He is, Aizawa replies. *How are you holding up?* Izuku swallows.

I'm okay, he replies, then, *I don't want to be alone.* It's the truth, but it feels so stupid to write it in the message, so ridiculous to send it to his teacher.

I wouldn't want to be, either, Aizawa replies. *Do you want me to go to your dorm building?* Izuku reads over the messages a few times, his throat feeling thick. He breathes, in and out, before turning and starting to walk down the sidewalk that leads to the dorms.

I should be okay, he replies. *I'm going to text Kacchan. Thank you, Sensei.* The wind has picked up, chilling his skin even through his coat.

It's not a problem, Aizawa replies. *Rivera is coming as soon as he can to talk about the new information. Let me know if you need anything. Don't go outside without shoes and a jacket, please.* Izuku can't help but smile at the last message, reading it over before he switches to texting Kacchan.

Hey, Kacchan, he sends. *Are you busy right now?* There's only a few moments before the message changes from "delivered" to "read," and Izuku watches the little icon that means Kacchan is typing.

What the fuck would I be busy with right now, it reads. *School's out if you haven't noticed.* Izuku can't the small smile that forms on his face as he reads the message.

Do you want to watch something? Izuku messages. *You can pick!* There's a moment where Kacchan's typing for far, far too long for the message that comes next, but Izuku isn't about to call him out on it.

Yeah why tf not, Kacchan replies. *U ok?* he sends next, and Izuku swallows. He hadn't expected that, not from Kacchan, but he supposes that's not fair, not really.

Yeah! he replies, but only after he slides his phone in his pocket and tugs open the door to the dorms does he really think about the question. Izuku isn't sure if he's okay. He isn't sure if he's

excited about the mission that's coming up, or if he's apprehensive. He doesn't know if Sasaki giving him more responsibility is a good thing or not, doesn't know if her trust in him is real or if this is a ploy to get more control over him or more information about him.

Izuku doesn't want to think about the situation with Shinsou. He doesn't want to consider what it means for Shinsou, what it means for their friendship. Izuku supposes it's not much of a surprise, really, that Shinsou doesn't want to see him any more. He doesn't think that it should shock him, but it doesn't mean that Izuku's fine with it, doesn't mean that it doesn't hurt.

Izuku doesn't think he's really *okay*, not entirely, but when he steps into the dorm and sees Kacchan in the kitchen, smells cooking popcorn and melted butter, he thinks he'll be fine for tonight, at least.

--

It's strange to go out as Ace when it's daytime, but Izuku supposes there's no real reason not to anymore. He's not working on Gekkeiju stuff, and he's technically a *hero*, not a vigilante, so there's nothing illegal about it. Plus, school's not going on right now, and it's not like he has to hide his identity. All of the people who could figure it out from just him going out in the daytime already know, so Izuku thinks it's safe enough. There's the added bonus of it being warmer when the sun's out, shining on the streets, and Izuku is relishing that extra warmth.

Izuku doesn't think that he's going to be doing much of anything today, to be honest. He doesn't think that the middle of the day on a weekday would garner much crime, not with the weather cold and damp, little bits of half-frozen rain falling from the sky unenthusiastically. But the city is alive, with people walking through the streets, wearing thick, fur-lined coats and bright colored mittens and scarves. It's almost foreign to Izuku, the way that everyone seems so carefree, so happy and bright. It's like Izuku's in an entirely different world than he had been in last year.

It's not like Izuku had been *happy*, last year. He'd been in his final year of middle school, with no friends and nothing to do over the break. He remembers that he'd spent most of it in his room, holed up at the computer, posting on hero fan forums. Back then, he'd almost been afraid to go out if it wasn't to track down a hero. It was like he'd agreed with the bullies, deep down, that he'd thought he really *was* fragile, weak, and useless. It's almost funny that now, he spends almost all of his free time outside, trying to fight crime himself. It's definitely funny that Izuku, who'd been called fragile and weak his whole life, is immune to death itself.

Izuku's thinking about his own mortality, thinking about how his mom had tried to get him to come Christmas shopping with her a year ago and he'd been too scared to run into kids from school to go, when he sees the woman. She's a little older than him, probably in university, and she's with a much older man. They're wearing matching red knit caps and mittens, and the man is wearing a shirt that says *World's Best Grandpa* on it in English, and Izuku's proud of himself that he can wear it. The girl is talking excitedly, walking along the sidewalk, when she takes a step forward, directly onto a patch of slick, dark ice.

Izuku moves before he's even consciously processing the situation. He's in his costume, and the boots he wears have enough traction that they let him sprint through the crowd, pushing through the people between him and the girl. He can see the oncoming traffic and the woman, falling back with her black hair fanning out into the air around her. It's like it's in slow motion, and Izuku somehow has enough time to wonder how he could *possibly* get there in time, and then he's barreling into the woman, shoving her away from the street she was about to fall into.

He topples over, landing beside her on the concrete sidewalk with a burst of bright pain on his shoulder. The woman gasps, her eyes fixed on the street behind Izuku, and Izuku doesn't have to

look to know that a car or a truck just passed by, whizzing through too fast for a busy street like this. He can hear the *whoosh* of the vehicle moving, can feel the wind against his skin.

“Oh my god,” the woman says, her eyes wide and teary. “Oh my god, you just saved my life.” She has a slight British accent, but she’s clearly Japanese. Izuku blinks at her, confused for a moment before he pushes himself off the ground, offering her a gloved hand.

“Sorry that I knocked you over in the process,” Izuku says, reaching up to rub the back of his neck with his free hand as he helps the woman to her feet. “I was worried I wasn’t going to get there in time.” He’s honestly not sure how he *had* made it, but he isn’t going to question things turning out *right* for once.

“You’re--I recognize you,” the girl says, blinking at him with huge, blue eyes. “You’re Ace! Oh my gosh, I’ve seen you all over the hero forums,” she says, before turning and looking up at the older man. “Grandpa, this is the vigilante I’ve been telling you about! You’ve really never seen him before?”

The older man squints at Izuku, before chuckling and shaking his head. “I can’t say I have, but he did just save my precious granddaughter, so I think I have to be a fan,” he says, his lips quirking up and deepening the smile lines and crow’s feet on his face.

“Thank you so much,” the girl says, giving Izuku a little bow. “You really did save me!” The grin that stretches across her face makes something warm swell up in Izuku’s chest.

“I-It was no problem, really,” Izuku says, looking to the side even though he’s wearing a visor. “I, um, I have to go, but be careful, okay?” He nods to her. “You don’t want to fall like that again.”

She beams at him. “I’ll be careful, Ace!” She bows again, and Izuku nods, taking off into a nearby alleyway. He climbs the fire escape quickly, his pulse racing in his fingertips.

Izuku knows that people are aware of his Ace persona. He knows that people follow stories about him, knows that they remember the way that he’s saved people. Especially within Musutafu, he knows that he’s fairly well known. It’s just, going out on the streets at night, increasingly keeping himself hidden as he works both on his missions for the Gekkeiju and on patrolling the city, he hasn’t been forced to see it, really. It leaves him with an uncomfortable feeling in his stomach.

Izuku doesn’t like that people are so fond of him. He doesn’t like that there are people who look up to him like this, who think of him as a hero. A year ago, he would have been delighted. Honored. Now, all he can think of is what the people *don’t* know. As he moves along the rooftops, away from the crowds, Izuku thinks about how he’s been responsible for the Gekkeiju obtaining *assets*, how he’s the reason that Shinsou is in the Gekkeiju at all.

Izuku doesn’t think of himself as a hero. He doesn’t even think of himself as a hero-in-training, doesn’t think of himself as anything close to a hero. He thinks, maybe, that he might be becoming a villain, and he hates himself for it.

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When Izuku returns from patrol, he heads to the staff dorm. Aizawa had shot him a text, telling him to meet him there when he returned from patrol. Izuku hadn’t questioned it, just accepted that Aizawa had some information for him, that maybe, Aizawa wanted to talk to him more about the upcoming operation. There’d been a meeting with Rivera, Izuku knows, but he hadn’t been included. Izuku assumes that’s what’s going on.

He doesn't expect to open up the door to the faculty down and smell the clean, warm scent of cooked rice and the rich, savory aroma of miso soup. Izuku blinks, tugging the door shut behind him as he stares at the dining area. A table is set, and Eri, Mouse, and Aizawa are already seated there. In the kitchen, Izuku can see his mom stirring a pot, and Present Mic is scooping spoonfuls of rice into bowls. Izuku stares at them, his eyes widening.

"Well, come on in!" Present Mic says, giving Izuku a huge smile. "It's just about ready, come and grab a bowl!" As Izuku watches, he passes a bowl full of rice over to Izuku's mom, who scoops a giant spoonful of curry on top of it. Izuku's stomach rumbles at the smell, and he walks forward, looking over at the table. There's miso soup at every seat already, with enough empty places for everyone who's here, plus one more. *Shinsou*, Izuku thinks to himself, but he pushes the thought away.

Izuku walks over to his mom, taking a bowl of curry. Eri, Mouse, and Aizawa already have bowls in front of them, but they seem to be waiting for everyone else before they eat. Izuku joins them, settling into the spot between Mouse and Aizawa. Mouse glances up at him before leaning to the side and knocking into him with her shoulder. It's a gentle, jostling motion.

"Izuku is here," Mouse says happily. "Mouse wants to know how he's been doing." Izuku smiles.

"I'm good, Mousey," he says. "How have you been?"

"Mouse hates math," she proclaims proudly. "But I really really like science." She nudges Izuku again, something that might be a smile on her lips. "We made big volcanoes," she says, nodding along with her words.

"The girls and I have been doing some homeschooling," Inko says as she walks over to the table with her own steaming bowl of curry. "I know you've been busy," she says, a sad smile on her face, "but I thought it would be nice if we all had dinner together, and of course I had to invite Yamada and Aizawa." She smiles as Yamada sits down across from Aizawa. Inko herself is across the table from Izuku, and it feels nostalgic. It reminds him of middle school dinners, at their tiny, two-person table. Izuku smiles.

"Thanks," he says. "I-I really appreciate it," he adds, feeling warmth on his cheeks. His mom nods, grinning.

"Well, let's eat!" she says. The rest of the table echoes her words, and they dig in. It's a kind of warmth, a kind of *family* that Izuku hasn't really felt in a while, and it makes him feel more alive than he has in weeks.

--

Izuku sees Shinsou in pieces. He sees him turning away from him when Izuku walks into the kitchen, angling his body into the fridge so that Izuku can't see his face. He sees him in the infirmary on his way back from a mission, a flash of purple hair a few beds over. He sees him leaving his dorm room late at night, just the shadows of his feet as he walks past Izuku's door.

It's lonely, on campus. Kacchan's still there, of course, and he and Izuku hang out more than they have since elementary school, but it's still just the two of them. Aizawa tells Izuku that Haruta and Ema are still on campus, too, but Izuku doesn't want to bother them, doesn't want to go to the 2-A dorm or the general studies dorm and bother them. Izuku texts Neito and Todoroki and the class group chat, sends them smiley faces and receives memes in return, but it's not the same as when they're all there in person. As much as Izuku has felt separate from his classmates, felt like he'd been on another planet, he feels so much more alone now.

Izuku thinks that part of it has to be the way Shinsou's avoiding him. Their rooms are right next door to each other, so it's impossible for him to *never* see Shinsou, impossible for him to never hear him, but if anything, it makes the silence feel even colder. Izuku stays up at night listening to the sound of Shinsou rustling around in his room. He doesn't sleep much, even with the lack of classes, and Izuku doesn't, either. Izuku wonders if, maybe, on the nights that Shinsou doesn't come back to the dorms at all, that Shinsou's sleeping. Maybe he has somewhere nice to go, somewhere where he isn't alone in a building with a person he hates or at a tower of villains who would be willing to torture him.

Izuku hates that he doubts that's the case. He hates that, more often than not, he hears the sounds of someone moving around restlessly, unsettled. He sees the bruises, high on Shinsou's cheekbones, wrapped around his wrists. He notices the way that Shinsou walks, quiet and near to the walls, like he's used to hiding. Izuku hates it.

Izuku knows it's his fault. He knows that Shinsou would be safe, would be able to rest peacefully, comfortably, if Izuku had been able to get Haruta out sooner, before he gave enough information on Shinsou to the Gekkeiju. Izuku knows this like he knows that he shouldn't be upset by the way Shinsou's treating him. The sneers, the scowls, and the *silence* are all deserved--Izuku has no right to feel bitterness and frustration. Shinsou's in the right, to be upset. Izuku would be too. It doesn't make it hurt any less.

So Izuku isn't expecting to see Shinsou waiting outside his door, when he opens it the morning after Kacchan goes home. Izuku'd been expecting to spend the morning alone, drinking tea and eating freezer waffles downstairs in a silent kitchen. He'd expected to go out without seeing anyone, patrol the city, then come back to his mom and Mouse and Aizawa at the staff dorm, eat dinner with them and Eri and Mic. He'd expected to go to bed in his dorm, to rest for a bit before he goes out again at night.

"S-Shinsou?" Izuku asks, his voice shaky with surprise. Shinsou just stares back at him, his eyes narrowed and his face flat. His hands are in his pockets, and his body language screams *uninterested*, shouts *bored*. Izuku can feel the tension nonetheless.

"Midoriya," Shinsou says, and while his voice isn't *warm*, it's not as cold as it's been. "We need to talk," he says, his gaze moving to where Izuku has started to wring his hands together.

"Y-Yeah," Izuku says, swallowing. "We--we do." He resists the urge to bite his lip. "Um. Where do you want to...?" He gestures vaguely with one hand, hoping that Shinsou gets the message. From the way Shinsou arches an eyebrow, turning on his heels and marching away, he does.

"Follow me," he says, and Izuku complies, hurrying after him. Izuku thinks he should know better than to hope, at this point, but he can't help it. His heart swells in his chest with the force of it, and he really, really hopes that he won't be let down.

Shinsou leads him down the stairs, into the common room. He stops at the dining area, sitting on one side of the table. Izuku swallows as he pulls out a chair across from Shinsou, the wood of the chair scraping on the floor with a noise that makes Izuku wince. He sits, watching as Shinsou stares him down from the other side of the table, his arms crossed over each other where they rest on the table.

"I'm not planning to use my quirk on you," Shinsou starts. "Just so you know." Izuku blinks.

"I-I didn't think you were going to," Izuku says, and he watches a thin line of tension ebb away from Shinsou's body. He's not *relaxed*, by any means, but he'd clearly thought that Izuku would be concerned about his quirk.

“Why did you join the Gekkeiju?” Shinsou asks. His tone is flat, irritated. Izuku takes a deep breath.

“I didn’t--I didn’t have any other choice,” Izuku answers, swallowing. “My quirk--every other possibility I saw ended with me dead,” Izuku says, almost tripping over the words. Izuku knows it’s true, technically, but the half-lie still feels like it’s burning a hole in his throat.

“Hm,” Shinsou grunts, his lips twitching into slight scowl. “You joined when you were kidnapped,” he says, and even though it’s not phrased as a question, Izuku nods.

“I-I’d been gathering information on them before that,” Izuku says, “but I didn’t--I have no intention of j-joining them.” Izuku swallows. “I didn’t want to be a villain,” Izuku says, his voice cracking.

“Neither did I,” Shinsou says flatly. “Why didn’t you tell me, as soon as you knew that they were after me?”

Izuku swallows. “I was--I was afraid to,” he admits, forcing himself not to look away from Shinsou’s eyes, even though it feels like they’re boring a hole in him. “I knew you’d--that you’d hate me, afterward.” Shinsou blinks, his eyes widening slightly, his scowl slipping.

“I don’t hate you,” he says, his brows furrowing slightly. “Don’t get me wrong--I’m *angry* with you, but I don’t *hate* you.” Shinsou’s face drops, and he sighs, reaching up a hand to run it through his hair. “You make it really hard to be pissed off at you, you know that?” Izuku blinks.

“I--um, I didn’t--” he starts, but Shinsou cuts him off with a heavy sigh.

“I know you’re not doing it on purpose,” Shinsou says, his voice heavy with exhaustion. He meets Izuku’s eyes. “I’m still angry at you, for the record.” Izuku blinks, watching as Shinsou sighs, rolling his eyes up to look at the ceiling. “But I think I’m going to go crazy if I keep avoiding you when you’re the only other person here.”

“I--I’m sorry,” Izuku says, bowing his head slightly. Izuku bites at his bottom lip, feeling the guilt rise in his chest. “I should have--I should have done something, I should have--I should have fought harder to protect you.”

“Yeah, well,” Shinsou says. “Hindsight’s twenty-twenty, isn’t it?” Izuku looks up, blinking as he sees Shinsou rubbing the back of his neck, glancing to the side. “You can make it up to me by helping take the Gekkeiju down.”

Izuku swallows, then he lets the small smile that pulls at his lips show. “Okay,” he says. “I can--I can do that.” Shinsou meets his eyes, and he looks like his normal self. Not his *happy* self, but Izuku will take it.

“I look forward to it,” Shinsou says, standing up from the chair. “I’m going to the tower, today,” he says as he stands, walking towards the stairs. Izuku swallows.

“Come to dinner after,” Izuku says, and Shinsou freezes in the entryway to the stairs.

“With Aizawa and your mom and Mic?” Shinsou asks, looking back over his shoulder. Izuku nods.

“And--and the kids,” Izuku says. “You don’t have to, but--we always set a place for you.” He swallows. “There’s more than enough food.”

Shinsou stares back at him for a long moment, his eyes wide, before he closes them, something

between a smile and a smirk stretching his lips.

“Alright,” he says as he starts up the stairs. “I’ll see you at dinner, then,” he says. Izuku thinks he might cry from sheer relief as he listens to Shinsou’s footsteps grow distant.

Chapter End Notes

content warnings: talk of suicide and self harm, unreliable narrator-ness (aka izuku bein dumb)

[discord!](#) [carrrd!](#)

i hope u enjoyed!!! i hope that shinsou wasn't too ooc.... my brain rotting

cold water

Chapter Summary

last time: sasaki reveals she knows about all for one, izuku asks for info, izuku reconciles with shinsou

Chapter Notes

hello my pogchamps i have been DESTROYED by schoolwork but i have like 3 weeks left of school before summer break :3c also im trying so hard not to get into minecraft (again) and mcYT but the temptation is there :pensive:

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Izuku feels vaguely unsettled when he and Mr. Clean start off on the sidewalk, walking out of the Gekkeiju tower, but he supposes that acting as a villain is always going to feel a little strange. It doesn't help that Clean keeps giving him strange little looks out of the corners of his eyes, his lips twitching. The man looks strange in the moonlight, his white-blond hair almost glowing. If Izuku squints, he can see dark roots. *He must dye it that color*, Izuku realizes. It makes sense, he supposes. Hair that shade is rare in a Japanese person, even in the age of quirks.

"This is your first like, real mission, right?" Clean asks, shoving his hands into the pockets of his coat. It's a nice, dark grey coat that covers up his black suit without making it look any less formal.

"Um, I-I've looked at h-houses, before," Izuku says. Clean snorts, shaking his head.

"That's the baby stuff, kid," he says, amusement in his voice. "I'll try and do most of the talking, then." He glances over to Izuku, his blue eyes bright even in the darkness. "It can be kind of intimidating the first couple'a times."

Izuku blinks. "Oh, um. T-Thanks?" he says, his feet dragging against the concrete. They're walking down a street that Izuku's never really been down before, but Manami had explained that he and Clean would be meeting up with some drug dealers who were supposed to be paying the Gekkeiju to use their territory. Izuku doesn't really understand most of it, but he supposes that it's not the worst mission he could be given. He's not sure how he'd feel if he had to do something that involved hurting innocent people directly.

"You were working for Fury and stuff, right?" Clean asks. "I mean, I know you were *technically* with Leadfoot, but all of us under her basically got stolen by Fury for a bit there," he says, sighing. "I'm like, not a big fan of the guy. He's way, way too eager to use his quirk on people without askin' them." Clean reaches up, pushing some of his puff, white hair away from his face as he glances down at Izuku. Izuku swallows, wetting his lip with his tongue.

"I, um--yeah, he used it on--on me, too," Izuku says, the mention of Heaven and Hell enough to send a shiver down his spine. Clean nods, looking sympathetic.

“Yeah, real rough guy. I thought Leadfoot was scary when I first started workin’ for her, but I’m glad she’s back or whatever now. She went like, totally inactive for a few months there.” He hums, kicking at a rock on the ground as he walks. “I mean, some of us little guys thought she was gonna defect or something.”

“R-Really?” Izuku asks, hoping that his stutter is taken as his normal nervousness and not a sign that he knows something Clean doesn’t. Thankfully, Clean barely seems to even notice it, just nodding.

“Yup. The lieutenants and the boss are like, super weird. They’re all kinda nuts, but hey, they pay good,” he glances to Izuku, a slight frown on his lips. “They’re like, paying you now, right? I know they weren’t at first.”

Izuku nods, shakily. “I’m, um, I’m working for information,” he answers. Clean hums.

“Mm, yeah. The boss likes shit like that,” he says, nodding. “It was starting to kinda freak me out, what they were doin’ with you and the catboy. It’s one thing to sell drugs or weapons or shit like that, but it’s another to be up at the top and see the weird abducting shit,” he says, shivering. “I dunno, though, I don’t think they’re doing it for no reason at all, you know?” He glances at Izuku. “I mean, you probably know that part better than me.”

“I-I have an idea,” Izuku says, looking to the ground. “But I--I don’t think I’m supposed to share,” he says. He’s not sure, to be quite honest, but he’s not about to take any risks for Clean. The man *seems* nice enough, but Izuku knows he’s gotten information on kids, knows that he’s a criminal for *real*, not just for an act.

“Yeah, I getcha,” Clean says, nodding along. “Welp, we’re pretty much here, so just--just don’t get shot or anything, ‘kay? You can do the whole ‘quiet scary guy thing’ if you want,” he says, gesturing to a warehouse in front of them. Izuku blinks. It’s surprisingly close to the tower, but it still looks like they’re in a semi-deserted part of the city. The warehouse itself is large and looks to be in pretty good shape. Izuku wonders if the Gekkeiju own it--there’s no sign of it being abandoned, no for-sale or for-rent signs or anything like that. He gives Clean a quick nod to show that he’d heard, but Clean doesn’t seem to be looking at him, anyway.

Clean walks up to the door, tugging it open. He looks back at Izuku, jerking his head forward, and Izuku scrambles after him. The inside of the warehouse looks like it’s only a little bit brighter than the outside, with a yellow cast to the light that fills the space. It’s pretty empty, and as Izuku walks inside, the only notable features he sees are the high ceilings, the concrete floors, and the group of three men standing on one side of the room. Izuku pulls the door shut behind him and Mr. Clean as Clean walks in, raising a gloved hand in greeting.

“Nice of you to show up this time,” Clean says, a wry smile on his lips. “Did my little message scare you or something?” The three men turn towards Clean. One of them is tall and thin, wearing a puffy green coat and a knit cap over his short, curly hair. Another is short and muscular, wearing all black except for the bright red bandana wrapped over his face, covering his mouth and nose. His hair is dark and stringy, hanging partially over his eyes. The third looks older than the others, crow’s feet around his eyes and his hair a mix of grey and black. He’s wearing heavy, well-worn jeans and a thick, fur-lined coat. He has four eyes, the second pair on his cheeks just below the first.

“We ain’t scared of *you*,” the guy with the bandana says, rolling his eyes. “You’re nothing to worry about. Your *boss* on the other hand,” he says, shaking his head. “Whatever. Come to give us our slap on the wrist?”

“Uh, it’s a little more than that this time,” Clean says, a nervous chuckle in his voice as he stops about fifteen feet from the three men. Izuku stops just next to him, his hands resting on his belt. “You’re gonna give us the money you owe, or I’m supposed to *make* you.” Clean raises his hands, shrugging. “You boys know that I prefer to do things nicely, so like, just hand over the cash and we don’t have to get messy.”

Bandana guy snorts, but the older man with four eyes elbows him. “Let’s talk about this, yeah?” he mutters, setting a hand on bandana guy’s shoulder and turning him around. Tall beanie guy joins them as they murmur among themselves. Izuku glances up at Clean, who gives Izuku a shrug, then raises a hand to guard his mouth and whispers to him.

“It’s usually best to let them talk it out if they wanna,” Clean says. “These guys aren’t stupid. They’ll probably make it easy on us if we let them.” Izuku nods at him, glancing back nervously at the three guys. Clean drops his hand, shoving both of his hands back into his pockets and humming quietly as the three men talk amongst themselves, shifting in place and shooting glances at Clean and Izuku.

“What’s the brat doing here?” tall beanie guy asks, jerking his head at Izuku. Izuku swallows, but Clean answers before he even has to think about what to say.

“Oh, him? He’s new,” Clean says, shrugging. “I’m showing him the ropes or whatever, but I gotta warn you, he’s kinda wild.” He glances down at Izuku. “Not sayin’ you guys can’t take care of yourselves, but you probably don’t want to get into a fight with the kid, y’know?”

The beanie guy rolls his eyes. “Dude, you’re not fooling anyone. He’s like, twelve,” he scoffs, crossing his arms over his chest. Clean just shrugs.

“Okay, your funeral or whatever,” he says. “So you gonna give us the money, or...?” Clean gestures at them to hurry up. Bandana guy scoffs.

“Yeah, yeah, we’ll give you the fuckin’ cash,” he says. He reaches into the pockets of his coat, rustling around for a moment before pulling out a wad of money and throwing it on the ground. “Is that enough for you?” he asks, a sneer in his voice. Clean just rolls his eyes, leaning down to scoop up the money.

Izuku sees one of the men, the one with the beanie, moving forward as if to kick Clean, and Izuku reacts without thinking. In a second, he’s got a knife pulled and he’s in between Clean and the beanie, just holding the knife up threateningly. It’s a move he’s used before to protect civilians when they’re in danger, but he’s never used it to help a *villain* before. Beanie guy freezes, his eyes wide.

“I told ya,” Clean says, laughing as he straightens up, money in hand. “You’re gonna need to pay double next time, but this is fine to start,” he says, straightening the bills out and stacking them on top of one another. “You know you can’t miss payments without a little interest.” He slides the now-neat stack of bills into his coat pocket. “You can stand down, kid,” he says, almost offhandedly, and Izuku blinks before taking a step back, sliding his knife back into its sheath.

“Is it gonna be you again next time?” Bandana asks, nodding his head to Clean. “Or should we expect the kid?”

“Just me,” Clean says. “If you behave well enough, we might even get to switch you back to the normal guy.” There’s a chuckle in his voice, and he turns, his hands shoved back into his pockets. Izuku follows him, sparing a glance back at the three men as they watch him with narrow eyes. Clean pushes open the door to the outside with a gloved hand, and Izuku follows after him. A chill

has set in, and Izuku shivers against the cold December air.

“You did good,” Clean says. “Man, I should start requesting you on more of these missions. You’re scary with a knife,” he says, grinning as he looks over to Izuku. Izuku just nods quickly. His mouth feels like it’s been sealed shut, like words wouldn’t come even if he tried to talk.

He’d defended a villain on instinct. His body had moved quickly, without his permission. Izuku wonders if the criminals would remember him later, when they saw Ace on television or online. He wonders if people will start to see Ace as a villain and not a vigilante, if they’ll know that he’s with the Gekkeiju. A shudder ripples through him, and it has nothing to do with the winter weather.

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It’s after a meeting with Rivera and everyone else that Izuku manages to get Ren alone. She’s been bouncing out of meetings quickly, her face set with frustration or anger or *something*, and Izuku hasn’t been able to stop her without alerting everyone else in the room to what he’s doing. He’s honestly not sure what day it is, but he thinks it’s after December 12th, so he’s late on his promise to Miura, but he figures that late is better than never.

“Ren!” Izuku calls out, his voice as loud as he dares. It’s just the two of them in the hallway right now, but the others are just ahead of them. Ren startles a little, freezing in place before she turns to look at him, blinking.

“Hey, what’s up?” she asks, smiling slightly. “Is everything okay?” She takes a few steps back over to him where he stands by the room that the meeting had been held in.

Izuku nods. “Y-Yeah, I’m okay,” he says, reaching his hand into his pocket. “I-I have something for you, actually,” he says, pulling out the small leaden rabbit that Miura had given him. It’s warm from his body heat, and he holds it out to Ren. She blinks, stepping forward and leaning down, plucking the rabbit out of Izuku’s palm.

“This is...” She holds it up to the light. It makes the little angel wings and the halo on the head of the rabbit look like they’re lined with gold, framed by the fluorescent lights above them. Ren stares at it for a moment, seemingly lost in what she’s seeing. Izuku swallows, wondering if he’s made a mistake, before Ren looks back down at him. There’s a huge smile on her face, a wide grin that makes Izuku’s stomach unclench.

“Thanks, Izuku!” she says, and that’s the only warning he gets before Ren’s pulling him into a tight hug. Izuku jerks in surprise, but he quickly relaxes as Ren wraps her arms around him, holding him tight. He wonders if he should hug her back, but just as he’s thinking that, she’s pulling away from him. Her eyes are a little red, but her smile is so wide that it looks like it’s hurting her cheeks.

“Tell her I said happy birthday, yeah?” Ren says, giving Izuku a wink and sliding the rabbit into the pocket of her coat. Izuku nods.

“She’s--I think she misses you,” Izuku says. Ren blinks, her face softening.

“I miss her too,” Ren says, her voice quiet and gentle. Her eyes close for a moment, and she sighs happily. “I hope...” she starts, but she trails off. Izuku thinks he knows what she was going to say. He knows that she can’t exactly say that she hopes to see Miura again, that it’s more complicated than that.

“I hope so too,” Izuku says. He gives Ren a smile, and he doesn’t flinch when Ren pulls him into another hug.

The wind is cold and harsh against Izuku's skin, blowing tiny droplets of mist against the bare skin on his cheeks. He's not wearing his costume tonight, just a pair of jeans and a sweatshirt that does little to keep him warm in the dead of the night. Especially not where he is now, atop a bridge in the outskirts of the city.

The water beneath the bridge is a cool, liquid black. It's reflecting the night sky above, Izuku knows, but the white ripples and specks that move with the water look like something out of a dream. If Izuku squints, he thinks he can see his own silhouette, just a hint of a shadow leaning over the bridge's railing.

The metal under his hands is cold and slick, covered in a thin coat of rain. The asphalt of the bridge is in a similar state, shiny with moisture, rainbows in the liquid from the oil on the ground. This is a quiet part of town, and at this time of night, Izuku doesn't think there's any chance of him being interrupted.

He's not sure what he's doing, exactly. It's not like something happened to make him need to reset, not like he's so upset that he's desperate to, or something. He just... wants to. It's not the kind of want that makes his hands shake and turns his dreams loud, but it's persistent nonetheless. It follows Izuku around in the corners of his mind, popping up whenever he's idle, whenever he's not doing anything. He thinks, *I should kill myself*, or *I wish I could open a vein right now*, or *fuck, I want to jump off of the roof*.

The roof is what keeps coming back to his mind, what he's been fantasizing on when he's walking to the train station, when he's patrolling and nothing's happening. He thinks about it a lot, about how the roof was what started it all. He knows that, without the sludge villain, he might not have even realized his quirk, might not have risked it, but it was jumping off of the roof that confirmed it for him. At the beginning, Izuku *only* had jumping. He didn't have knives or a noose or poison. He just had to find a tall building and walk right off the edge.

Izuku doesn't want to do it on campus. He knows that Aizawa's keeping a close eye on him for more than one reason, but he's given a strange amount of freedom on his patrols. It's like Aizawa and his mom and Mic think that he's fragile, that he needs to be babysat at the school so that he doesn't cut himself up or walk out into the woods in the snow, but when he's in the city, they think he can handle himself. Izuku isn't sure if it's condescending or just stupid. If he can hurt himself in his dorm room, he can hurt himself outside of it, too.

Like right now, Izuku thinks as he swings his legs over the railing, standing on the thin ledge between him and the churning water below. He's not actually sure if this is sea or a river, here, but whatever it is, it's far below him and it looks *angry*. Jumping from a bridge is a nice compromise between old and new, Izuku thinks. It's like jumping from a roof in essence, but it's a change in scenery. Izuku thinks he likes the drama of it, thinks that the peace and quiet of knowing he won't get caught here is nice. It's not like the roofs, which he's killed himself with purely for utility before. This is something he's doing just because he can.

Izuku takes a step forward into thin air. Like always, there's a rush of adrenaline in the pit of his stomach, the rush as his body starts to drop down. Izuku wonders if this bridge is high enough up that it'll be like hitting concrete. He wonders if his quirk will reset him right back to the bridge, or if he'll be elsewhere in the city or if he'll be home in his dorm, before he left. He shuts his eyes.

The water is icy cold, and it does not feel like concrete. Izuku only has time to gasp before he feels himself pulling away from the world.

“Come in,” Sasaki says, her voice light and happy. Izuku swallows, stepping into the room that’s become familiar. Sasaki’s as unsettling as ever, but there’s something nice about knowing that he’d killed himself last night. He’d woken up in his room, or else he might have done it a second time, just because. Izuku thinks it had helped with the nightmares, but he’s not sure if that was just because of how exhausted he is lately.

“H-Hello,” Izuku says, bowing slightly to her. Sasaki nods, reclining in the leather sofa.

“How have you been enjoying your new responsibilities?” Sasaki asks, her smile friendly. “I heard from Sumire that you and Clean did quite well on your task,” she says. Izuku thinks she’s being genuine, but it’s hard to tell.

“It--it went well,” Izuku says, nodding slightly as he sits down on the ottoman in front of the coffee table. Sasaki seems pleased with his answer, nodding.

“I’m glad to hear that,” she says, folding her hands together and resting them on top of her crossed legs. “I wanted to ask you about what information, exactly, you were hoping to get in return for your work,” Sasaki says, her eyes narrowing slightly and her smile stretching her cheeks. “You don’t have to decide everything now, at course, but it would be good if I could give you your payment for that last job now.”

Izuku blinks, swallowing. Part of him is excited--he can feel his heartbeat picking up in his chest--but he mostly feels lost. He’s not sure what he should ask for, what information would be the most useful for him to know. He’d have to know something to know what to ask, really, but he supposes he has a distinct advantage here. *I can ask more than once*, he thinks to himself, swallowing.

“Um, I-I can ask anything?” Izuku asks, wiping the sweat from his palms off of his slacks. Sasaki’s eyes track the motion, and Izuku curses himself for not hiding his anxiety better. He swallows, his mouth feeling dry and his throat feeling stiff.

“Within reason,” Sasaki says. “I’ll let you know, if you need to pick something else,” she says, her tone light and casual. Izuku nods shakily.

“Who’s--who’s been hurting Shinsou?” he asks, because it’s been the question on his mind for a while now. Shinsou’s being paid, and he joined willingly--he shouldn’t be getting hurt. It doesn’t make *sense*, not when Izuku’s seen that Clean isn’t covered in bruises even after working with Fury. Shinsou should be *fine*.

Izuku watches Sasaki blink, her wings twitching the tiniest bit behind her. She frowns, tipping her head to the side.

“I have to say, that’s not what I was expecting you to ask,” Sasaki says, and there’s genuine surprise in her voice. “I have no idea,” she says slowly, her lips curling up at the edges into a slight smile. “It’s not any of my people,” she says, shrugging. Izuku swallows.

“Who--who else could it be?” Izuku asks, shaking his head slightly. “I mean, he’s--are you sure Fury isn’t hurting him?” Izuku asks. Sasaki shakes her head.

“No, I’m sure,” she says. “Kazuo hasn’t been alone with him, and even if he had been, he wouldn’t hurt someone without my permission,” she says, reaching a hand up to rest a finger on her chin. “It’s interesting, really. I had assumed he sustained those injuries during training at the school, but judging by how you’re acting, I doubt that’s the case.”

“Oh,” Izuku says, and he swallows. Sasaki seems amused by his discomfort, her face dipping into a loose grin.

“Well, that’s your question for this time, I suppose,” she says. “Harder missions will get you more than one piece of info, of course. I’m very fair,” she says, before uncrossing her legs and standing up. Izuku is struck, not for the first time, by how very *tall* she is. She shakes her wings out, the feathers rustling slightly as she raises her arms above her head, stretching.

“What are you doing after this, Midoriya?” Sasaki asks, glancing down at him with a sly look on her face. Izuku freezes, feeling his muscles go stiff. He knows there’s no way that she knows about his quirk, no way that she knows he plans to kill himself to repeat this conversation and get another question answered, but it still makes his heart race in his chest.

“I-I was going to--going to head home,” he says, his voice weak. Sasaki hums, her eyes narrowing.

“I’ll see you next time, then,” she says, and she gestures to the door. “Go on.”

Izuku doesn’t hesitate, scrambling out of the room perhaps a little too quickly. He knows that it’s just what people say, that Sasaki means *next time* as in the next meeting they have, not next *reset*, but it seems a strange coincidence for her to say that. As Izuku leaves the tower, as he walks along the streets, his hands are shaking and his heart is racing. He kills himself by jumping from the fire escape of a tall building not far from the tower, and as he does, he can’t help but wonder. *Does she know?*

--

Izuku opens his eyes just outside the door to the room with Sasaki in it. His skin feels cold and sweaty, even though he knows it isn’t. He takes a deep breath and knocks on the door. It’s not like he hasn’t done this before, but the thing is, now he’s wondering if Sasaki *knows*. He’s wondering if Sasaki can tell how many times it’s been, if she’s assuming it’s been many, many times, or if she thinks it’s the first.

“Come in,” Sasaki says, and Izuku enters the room. He doesn’t wait, this time, instead moving straight to the ottoman and sitting down on it. The leather cushion compresses softly under his weight. He glances up, meeting Sasaki’s gaze as she watches him openly.

“I heard from Sumire that your mission with Clean went well,” Sasaki says, just like last time. Izuku nods.

“It did,” Izuku says. “Am I--am I here because of that?” he asks, and his voice cracks just the right amount. *If she’s suspicious, I need her to think that this is my first time through*, he tells himself. He’s not sure if this is him being paranoid, if he’s reading into things too much, but he’s definitely not going to push it, not going to give anything else away if he can help it.

“Sort of,” Sasaki says, smiling as she reclines back in the leather couch. “I wanted to ask what information you wanted as payment for this last job,” she says, waving one hand. “You don’t have to tell me everything you want, just for this job is fine.” She seems relaxed. Izuku feels his body untensing slightly. She isn’t *acting* like she knows anything, at least.

“Can I--can I ask about something, um, personal?” Izuku asks. Sasaki doesn’t seem surprised. Her eyes narrow from below as her smile stretches into a grin.

“Of course,” she says. “Although, if it’s something I can’t share, I’ll have to decline, of course.” She tips her head to the side just enough that her black hair shifts, falling away from her face.

“What did you want to ask me?”

“How do you--how do you know about All for One?” Izuku asks. “I-I looked on forums, on the web, and I-I couldn’t find anything c-calling him by that name. He’s just--just listed as working with the League, and n-none of the media seem to agree on his quirk.” Izuku leans forward slightly, watching as Sasaki’s eyebrows raise slightly.

“I figured you’d ask about that at some point,” she says, propping her arms up along the back of the couch. “It’s a long story, but I spent a good portion of my childhood in America,” she says breathing out heavily and glancing down. “All for One was here, of course, but a lot of the people who knew about him were over there. I heard some things, when I was a hero.” She glances up at Izuku, her lips quirking into a smile. “I’ve told you I used to be a hero, right?”

Izuku shakes his head. “N-No, you haven’t,” he says. He swallows. Rivera hadn’t mentioned that, hadn’t said that Sasaki had been a *hero*, and as far as Izuku can remember, neither has Sasaki. Admittedly, his memory is a little messed up, with him constantly having to think back and trying to figure out what Rivera has told him and what Sasaki has told him, what he’s supposed to know, but this is a surprise to him. Sasaki watches him through half lidded eyes as she sighs, tilting her head back and up, until her eyes flicker up to the ceiling.

“My sister and I were designed to be powerful,” Sasaki says. “If you have a powerful weapon, it’s only natural that you use it,” she says, her head tipping forward again. “From the time that I was around ten or so until I was nineteen, I was a child hero.” Her grin looks painted on, almost like a grimace. Izuku swallows. *It looks like she’s in pain.*

“H-How old are you now?” Izuku asks, before remembering that he’s only supposed to get the one question. Sasaki seems unbothered, though.

“I’m 28,” she says calmly, easily. “I learned about All for One overseas, as confidential information given to my sister and I. At the time, of course, he was believed to be dead.” She sighs, looking down at the table. “He’s part of why I returned to Japan after all that time,” she says. “Lucky for me, he hadn’t died at all.” She laughs lightly, under her breath. Izuku swallows.

“When he transfers quirks,” Izuku starts, but he stops when Sasaki looks up at him, shaking her head and clicking her tongue.

“I think that’s enough for you for today,” she says, leaning back heavily into the couch, tipping her head back to stare at the ceiling once again. “You can leave,” she says. “I don’t have anything else for you today.” Her voice is heavy, tired. Izuku swallows. He feels vaguely unsettled as he stands up and walks out of the room and into the rest of the tower.

He doesn’t reset that time. He thinks that this is something he needs Sasaki to know he knows, to get more information in the future. He doesn’t want to slip up, reveal that he knows about this if he erases it from the timeline, doesn’t want to give her even more reason to suspect him. Still, he has more questions than answers by the time he leaves the tower and steps out into the frosty air.

Chapter End Notes

content warning: suicide as per usual

[discord!](#) [carrd!](#)

i hope u enjoyed!!! it's weird writing about it being december when it's april here lol i keep getting confused as to why it's so cold in the story

suspicion

Chapter Summary

last time: izuku hangs out with mr clean (not the bald dude), gives ren miura's gift, kills himself real quick, talks to sasaki (and kills himself again but what's new)

Chapter Notes

hi pogchamps im sick today which sucks balls but!! im getting a lot of shit done
yeehaw have an early-ish chap again

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

It's an unseasonably warm day when Izuku goes to meet Kacchan at the park. It isn't *really* warm, but Izuku's able to wear just a hoodie over a long-sleeved shirt instead of his usual heavy coat over a sweatshirt. The sun is out, too, and it's the bright, harsh kind of sunlight that only comes in the winter like this.

Except for the pines, the trees are bare, dark branches stretching out into the blue sky. The pine trees are all at the back of the park, a line of dark green that contrasts the brown and grey of the rest of it. Izuku steps into the park with his hands in the kangaroo pocket of his hoodie, his eyes catching on Kacchan's blonde hair where the other boy sits on a wooden bench, his gaze following Izuku. The sunlight makes Kacchan's hair look nearly white, glowing like it's lit from within. Izuku smiles at his friend, raising one hand in a wave as he jogs a little to get closer.

"Hey, Kacchan!" Izuku says, a smile splitting his face. "How--how are you?" he asks as he stops in front of Kacchan, sliding his hands into his pockets. Kacchan huffs out a breath of air, pushing himself up from the bench. He's wearing a bright red hoodie of his own over fitted, dark skinny jeans. The look suits him.

"I'm fine, nerd," Kacchan says. "Do you want to go for a walk or some shit?" he asks, his head turning to the side. Izuku follows his gaze to where there seems to be a gravel path, leading further into the park. Izuku nods.

"Yeah, we can--we can do that," he says. There's something strange, still, about meeting up with Kacchan and having the other boy treat him like a friend instead of like a chew toy. It's nice, for sure, but Izuku just isn't used to it.

"Good," Kacchan says, turning and walking off in the direction of the path. "I'm tired of fuckin' sitting. I swear that's all I'm allowed to do at home," he grumbles. Izuku hurries after him, slowing as he draws even with his friend, walking beside him. He sees Kacchan glance over at him quickly, then move his eyes to face forward once again.

"I guess you're not enjoying your break then?" Izuku asks, his eyes trained ahead of them. Izuku thinks it's pretty, even though the grass is mostly a brownish-gold color and the trees are stripped nearly bare. There's a sort of starkness to it, like it's just the bare bones of the park, just the

scaffold that makes it up.

“It’s whatever,” Kacchan says with a huff. “Not like yours is any better, with your fuckin’ villain thing or whatever,” he says, kicking at the ground with his shoe. It makes a scraping noise that startles Izuku just the slightest bit. “How’s that shit going, anyway?”

“It’s--it’s going okay,” Izuku says. “I’m kind of--I think it might be over, soon,” he says. He’s been trying not to hope for that, but he knows that there have been whispers of Rivera and the Commission and the police using the jailbreak to capture the lieutenants and Sasaki, at least. He hasn’t been told anything official, yet, but he’d like to hope that it’d end with the Gekkeiju falling instead of getting their hands on powerful abilities for Sasaki and another wanted criminal, one that could take Izuku’s quirk.

“Good,” Kacchan says, then pauses a moment before continuing. “You use your quirk for that stuff?” he asks, and Izuku knows what he’s getting at. Izuku sighs.

“I said I’d tell you by the end of break, not--not midway through,” Izuku says. “But, yeah, I-I kind of have to use it,” he says. It’s his turn to kick at the ground, scuffing up dust from the gravel and dirt below. Kacchan grunts, shoving his hands into the pockets of his jeans.

“I think it’s fucking stupid to be keeping it secret,” Kacchan says. “Who even knows, besides me and Neito?” Izuku swallows.

“I-I think Todoroki has an idea, but I--I haven’t told him,” Izuku says. “He’s just--just guessing, I think.” He breathes out. “Haruta knows, too, but that’s just because of his quirk.”

“Haruta’s the mind reading one, right?” Kacchan asks, his brow furrowing slightly. “You should really start telling me more of this shit. When did you get so fuckin’ obsessed with keeping secrets, anyway? When we were kids I could never get you to shut up,” he says, and his tone isn’t quite as light as it should be. Izuku knows that Kacchan’s thinking about the way he treated Izuku when they were kids, the way that he bullied him mercilessly.

“I-I didn’t think anyone would believe me, when I first got my quirk,” Izuku says, looking down at the ground. “It’s--it’s like, of *course* the quirkless kid would lie and say he has an unprovable quirk, one that came in way, way later than--than anyone’s quirk comes in.” He swallows. “I didn’t think that--that you’d believe me e-either, when I told you,” he adds. He hears Kacchan breathe out, a slow, steady breath.

“Sorry,” Kacchan mutters, before clearing his throat. “I guess that shit makes sense,” he says, louder and more confidently. “And you thought people would stop you from using it or something, right?” he asks, and when Izuku glances up at him, he’s watching Izuku thoughtfully. Izuku nods, swallowing.

“Y-Yeah,” he says. “I don’t think--I don’t think people would *get* it,” he says, turning his gaze back to the ground, to his feet as he walks forward. “Aizawa-sensei and--and my mom, especially,” he says. “They wouldn’t want me using it as much as I do.” There are little weeds growing up in between the loose pebbles of gravel, some of them with tiny, white flowers. It’s strange to see them in the winter, like this, thin lines of mint green and little florets of white, but Izuku’s glad they’re there. He tries not to step on any of them.

“Would I try to stop you?” Kacchan asks, his voice quiet and serious. Izuku thinks for a moment.

“Y-Yeah, you would,” Izuku says, nodding. “It’s--it’s probably not as bad as whatever you’re thinking,” he adds quickly, biting at his lower lip. Kacchan grunts.

“I don’t like it, whatever it is,” he says, his voice a grumble. “It’s pretty fucking clear that you have to hurt yourself in some way for it to work, and if it was something minor like how Round Face pukes when she uses hers too much, you wouldn’t fucking hide it,” Kacchan says, frustration clear in his voice. “I know I’ve said a lot of stupid shit to you, but I don’t--” he breaks off, and when Izuku glances over to him, he’s swallowing, his Adam’s apple bobbing in his throat. “I don’t like it when you’re hurting yourself.”

Izuku doesn’t know how to reply, so he looks ahead, at the pine trees bordering this part of the path, at the shadows of the branches that streak across the ground. He hums in acknowledgement to what Kacchan said, thinking about how very different this is from how the two of them had been this time last year. He takes a moment to breathe in the cool, pine-scented air.

“I’m trying to do it less,” Izuku says, quietly. “I think that--that after the villain stuff is over, I might... I might tell Aizawa-sensei myself.” He sighs, biting at his bottom lip. “But I don’t--I don’t want other people to get hurt because I told him too soon,” he says. He sees Kacchan nod hesitantly out of the corner of his eyes.

“Kinda hard to get it when I don’t actually know what you’re fucking talking about,” Kacchan says, his tone even and quiet. “But I get it. I wouldn’t want to stop using my quirk to be a hero even if it was hurting me or some shit,” Kacchan says. Izuku watches him raise a hand, looking down at his palm. “Did you know that it fucking burns me if I overuse it? Different than your shit, but yeah.”

Izuku blinks. “I-I thought that stopped a few years ago,” he replies, looking at Kacchan’s unscarred palm. “You don’t--you don’t seem to be in pain when you use it.”

Kacchan snorts, dropping his hand. “You don’t fucking look like you’re in pain most of the time, either,” he says, tipping his head back and staring up. “It’s not really bad or anything like that. Just fuckin’ stings after a long training session.” He shoves his hand back into his pocket. “I wouldn’t give a shit even if it was blasting my fingers off. I’d keep fucking using it, so I get it. I don’t like that it hurts you, but I get it.”

Izuku blinks. A smile spreads across his face slowly. “Thanks, Kacchan,” he says, leaning over and nudging his friend with his shoulder. Kacchan snorts, shoving him back gently.

“I haven’t done anything you should be fucking thanking me for,” Kacchan mutters. Izuku just shoves him again, and they continue walking down the path together.

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Izuku’s started to really like the early morning, alone on the outskirts of the city. He doesn’t just like it because it’s easy to kill himself out here, because he can get away with it, but that’s certainly part of it. He has to admit, there’s something nice about dying outside, something nice about being able to look up at the stars or the sunrise as he draws his last breath. It’s peaceful, restful in a way that dying quickly, hidden in the corner of his dorm room and praying nobody notices isn’t.

Izuku doesn’t think he’s going to kill himself this morning. It’s not that he doesn’t want to--he does, he always does--but he doesn’t think that it’s practical. It’d be easy to do it, easy to walk the extra two or three blocks to the bridge or to find a quiet corner to slice himself open, but he needs to be back on campus fairly soon, to shower and eat and sleep for a few hours before his tasks this afternoon. He could earn himself some extra time by killing himself, but he’s never sure how far back, exactly, his quirk will reset him.

Izuku thinks, as he walks along the narrow sidewalk beside the street, that he should stop killing

himself so much. He should stop drawing lines through the flesh of his thighs, should stop pressing the pads of his fingers into the wounds. He should stop waiting for the coldest part of the early morning and throwing himself off of bridges, should stop letting himself sit out in the ice for far too long, until he wakes up a few hours earlier. It's not good for him, he knows that, but there's something about it that makes him feel *better*, even if he doesn't feel *good*.

Lately, Izuku feels like he is a doll. He feels like he's a puppet, with the Commission tugging on one of his strings and the Gekkeiju tugging on the other. He feels like he's caught between a rock and a hard place, like even if he does amazing, catches the villains and ends the Gekkeiju, he'll still have helped them first. He'll still have put Shinsou through pain, still will have worried his mom and Aizawa. He'll still have done things that might get more kids kidnapped, might get more people attacked.

Izuku thinks that he kills himself at least partly because it's something that he's doing all on his own. It's not something he's doing because he *has* to, not something that someone else told him to do. He knows it's stupid, knows that he should find something like this that isn't *killing himself*, but he doesn't want to let it go. Part of him likes the fact that it's something that people would try to stop him from doing, that it's something that he shouldn't do, something forbidden.

Izuku doesn't like that he can't seem to stop. He doesn't like that thoughts cling to him tight, thoughts of cold seeping into his skin, of the bite of a knife into his flesh, of the rush of air around him as he falls. He doesn't like that when anything goes wrong, now, he finds himself thinking *oh, well I should just go kill myself*, even when it's something minor. He hates the way that, if he tries to stop himself from doing it when he wants to, it feels like his skin is crawling.

Izuku thinks that not having the routine of classes has made him worse, too. It's not like Manami is still asking him to cut himself, not like anything worse than usual is happening. If anything, things are better now than they've been for a while. Izuku sleeps enough, he has support from his mom and his teacher and his friends, and he's not being tortured, and yet, he thinks he's doing worse than ever. His nightmares still plague him, and even with his tentative peace with Shinsou, he doesn't dare ask for anything as personal as that.

Shinsou seems worse, too, but Izuku supposes that's not surprising. He's got a reason, at least. His life has been turned upside down, he's been shoved into a villain organization with no time to prepare, no time to mentally process what's going on. He's being forced to be what he's been told his entire life that his quirk made him, forced to be a villain when Izuku knows that all Shinsou's ever wanted is to be a hero.

That, and someone is hurting him. Izuku walks faster along the sidewalk out of discomfort, his skin prickling until his clothes. Even though Sasaki had said the Gekkeiju weren't hurting him, Izuku can tell Shinsou *is* getting hurt. There's bruises on his forearms when his sleeves slide up, bruises and scrapes on his face, on the palms of his hand. Izuku can see why Sasaki would think they come from training--they look like the kind of injuries you get from being in a fist-fight with someone, except Shinsou's knuckles aren't bruised or scraped up. Whatever's going on, Shinsou isn't hitting back, at least not with his bare hands. Izuku doesn't want to think too hard about it, doesn't want to acknowledge something like this, but he can't *ignore* it.

He's started to pay more attention. Shinsou's always hurt after he spends the night away from the school, but not *every* time he's not at the dorms. It's like half of the time, Shinsou goes somewhere where he's getting hurt, and the other half, he isn't. Izuku knows what that means, most likely, and it makes him shiver in a way that has nothing to do with the damp, icy air outside.

For all Izuku has been through, for all he's suffered, he's always had people in his corner. As much

as he *feels* alone, especially out in the city like this, his boots dragging along icy concrete and the wind whipping the bare skin on his face, he's always had someone. Early on, it was just his mom, but she'd always been there for him, even before she knew about him being Ace. She'd helped him clean up the beach, giving him lots of garbage bags and cheering him on. She'd cleaned up his wounds and looked after him before he went to UA, supported him when he got into the school of his dreams. She'd even moved to campus and adopted the girl he risked his life to save.

Izuku can't imagine what it would be like to go through what he's gone through and come home to people who only want to hurt him more. He doesn't like to think about it, like if he thinks the sentence *I think Shinsou's parents are abusing him* that it'll make it true, but he can't think of any other way around it. Shinsou's not the type to let someone bully him, not without fighting back, and he's trained well enough to keep anyone off of him if he *wants* to stop them. Izuku trusts, at least for the moment, that Sasaki isn't lying. For one thing, she'd seemed genuine and for another, Izuku's sure that Shinsou would be getting healed up at the infirmary if he'd been hurt anytime he was wearing one of the wires.

Aizawa doesn't even seem to know about the injuries. Izuku's noticed that the bruises are always carefully hidden by long sleeves, that Shinsou's too tired to come to dinner or has to be out for a mission any time his face is scraped up or there's something he can't hide. Izuku isn't stupid. He knows Shinsou has makeup, too, sees the smears of flesh-colored cream on the white towel hanging in the boy's bathroom. He's noticed that Shinsou will have a bruise on his face when he comes out of the shower, but not after he goes up to his room to finish getting ready, to do his hair and put on his shoes. Izuku doesn't think that Aizawa would let this slide, if he knew.

Izuku wonders if Shinsou knows that Izuku knows. Izuku doesn't think so, not really. He sees the bruises and the scrapes and the roughed-up skin in pieces, in flashes of the early morning and late at night, when Shinsou isn't talking to him, when Shinsou probably doesn't even know Izuku is there. Izuku thinks that Shinsou probably sees Izuku's self destructive habits the same way. He knows that there's blood on his own towel, and even though he tries to hide it so that the stained part of his dark-green towel is always facing the wall or on the inside of the folds, he's sure he's messed up at least once. He doesn't know if Shinsou's pieced it together, though. He wonders if Shinsou would come clean to him about whatever is happening to him at home if Izuku shared what he does out on the streets, when it's too early for anyone to be awake and catch him.

Izuku doesn't dare to find out. He just thinks about these things when he's not doing anything, when he's walking home and he sees a flash of violet in a shop window, something that reminds him of his friend. He thinks about how he's put Shinsou in even more danger, when he might have been suffering for a long, long time before. He thinks about how Shinsou came to the school with nothing, nothing at all. He thinks about Shinsou's hard exterior, about how the boy is so good at being cruel when he needs to be.

Izuku wants to save Shinsou, too. The thing is, he's not even sure what he'd be saving the boy from. As he walks through the city, he decides to gather more information, to use some of the extra time his quirk grants him to figure out what's really going on. He's not sure if he's looking to prove himself right or prove himself wrong, but either way, he just needs to know.

--

It's long after the others have usually gone to bed that Izuku gets back one night. He's not expecting there to be anyone up, let alone anyone in the kitchen, so when he steps into the common room of the dorm and immediately hears the sound of something sizzling in a pan, he jumps nearly a foot in the air out of sheer surprise. He sees Shinsou glance back over his shoulder, one eyebrow raised.

"I thought you were already asleep," Shinsou says, turning back to the pan. Izuku can see that he's stirring around what looks like ground beef. "There should be enough for you anyway. I was going to put the leftovers in the fridge."

Izuku blinks. "W-What are you making?" Izuku asks, shutting the door behind him and stepping into the warmth of the common room. It smells like spices and meat, but Izuku can't place what it is, exactly.

"Just beef and some rice," Shinsou says. "It's not anything fancy." Izuku glances around, spotting the rice cooker on the counter not far from Shinsou.

"I didn't know you could cook," Izuku says as he creeps into the kitchen. It still feels strange, being able to talk casually with Shinsou like this after so many days of the other boy avoiding him, glaring at him and giving him the silent treatment. Izuku can't help but be grateful that Shinsou decided to trust him again, if only just a little bit. Shinsou snorts lightly as he shifts the pan off of the burner on the stovetop.

"I wouldn't call making ground beef with a premade packet and putting rice in the rice cooker 'cooking,' but yeah, I can do the basics," Shinsou says. Izuku nods, before realizing that at the angle Shinsou's turned, there's no way that he can see Izuku.

"It smells nice," Izuku says, watching as Shinsou opens a cabinet and pulls out two bowls.

"Thanks," Shinsou says. "If you want some, you have to help with the dishes," he says, the unspoken question clear in his words.

"Y-Yes, please," Izuku says, his stomach grumbling under his ribs. "I don't mind doing the dishes," he adds, just in case it isn't clear. He hears Shinsou grunt in acknowledgement as he starts spooning fluffy, steaming rice into the bowls.

"Are you, um, are you part of the thing with the jailbreak?" Izuku asks as Shinsou starts to scoop beef on top of the rice. Izuku sees Shinsou glance at him over his shoulder, an eyebrow raised.

"Yeah, I am," Shinsou says. "I'm assuming Sasaki wants to use my quirk to get through some guards or whatever," he says, turning back to the food, setting the pan back down on the stove with a clang. "Grab some chopsticks for us, will you?" Shinsou says, picking up the two bowls and starting to walk past Izuku, towards the dining table. Izuku nods quickly, walking over to the drawer with the utensils in it.

"Do you think we need spoons, too?" Izuku asks as he grabs two pairs of chopsticks. Shinsou hums as Izuku hears the sound of two bowls being set down on the wooden table.

"Yeah, that's a good idea," Shinsou agrees. Izuku nods, grabbing two spoons as well before nudging the drawer shut with the edge of his hip. He walks back over to the dining table, where Shinsou's put one bowl across the table from another, where he's sitting. Izuku sits down in the empty place, sliding Shinsou a set of utensils.

"Thanks," Shinsou mutters.

"Let's eat," Izuku says with a smile, and Shinsou echoes him before he picks up his chopsticks and starts to shovel food into his mouth. Izuku can tell that he's hungry, which makes sense--Izuku is too, after such a long day out patrolling and doing work for the Gekkeiju. He digs into his own food, tasting the spices and the sweet, clean taste of cooked rice.

Izuku eats in silence for a few moments before he sets his bowl down and swallows what's in his

mouth, glancing up at Shinsou. Shinsou seems to have slowed down slightly as well, and he catches Izuku's gaze momentarily, one of his eyebrows raising ever so slightly in question. Izuku swallows again, then speaks.

"Are you at the tower every time you aren't here?" Izuku asks. He's surprised that he doesn't stutter, but then again, he's had this conversation multiple times before in his head, practiced it over and over again. He really should find something better to do on the walks through the city, but it's not like he can listen to music or be on his phone. He has to stay alert, which means the only thing he can really do is to just think.

"Nah," Shinsou says, shaking his head and swallowing his mouthful of food. "I'm at home with my folks a lot too. They wanted me to be home more, since school isn't in session right now." He sounds casual about it, unbothered. Izuku hopes that's a good sign.

"Makes sense," Izuku says, stirring his food around with his chopsticks. "Since my mom spends most of her time on--on campus, now, I haven't been home at all," he adds. Shinsou nods, scooping another bite into his mouth. He seems to be done talking, pulling out his phone and scrolling. Izuku gets the hint, ducking his head and starting to eat once again. He hopes he's reading too much into this, hopes that he's just seeing something that isn't there, but his instincts tell him that this is something real.

--

Izuku figures that this is probably considered rude of him, but he honestly can't make himself feel bad about it. Following Shinsou home isn't something he decided to do just because he felt like it--he has a real reason! Now that Izuku is lurking across the street from Shinsou's apartment, though, atop the roof of the building that faces it, he feels kind of like a creep, though. It doesn't help that he'd tailed Shinsou all the way here, following as close behind him as he dared, ducking from alleyway to alleyway.

An inky blackness covers most of the night, with the sky too heavily blanketed with clouds for any starlight to leak through. Izuku's pretty sure that it's a crescent moon, not a new moon, but it's impossible to tell. Either way, the shadows seem darker than normal, longer than normal as he watches Shinsou finish climbing the stairs, walking up to one of the doors on the second floor of the building. He stands there for a moment, his back to Izuku, but Izuku figures he's unlocking the door, because a moment later, he's opening it, yellow light spilling out onto the walkway just outside it. Izuku watches Shinsou step inside, pulling the door shut behind him.

Izuku kind of hates that this isn't his first time spying on an apartment, but it certainly helps him to know what to do. The building he's on top of is close enough to Shinsou's that he can see into the windows that are facing his direction, although he's doubtful he'll be able to hear anything. He watches through a window that looks like it leads to a living room, watches as Shinsou kicks off his shoes. He doesn't seem to say anything, doesn't seem to announce his presence, even though Izuku can see two other people in the living room.

Shinsou's mother is tall, with chin-length curly hair that could be auburn or brown. It's hard to tell with the lighting and the distance, but Izuku thinks her eyes are blue or grey, maybe. Shinsou's dad has short, cropped hair, but Izuku can tell it's violet, the same color as Shinsou's. His eyes are a dark color, though, nothing like the lilac shade of Shinsou's. Izuku watches as Shinsou steps into the living room, facing his parents. He sees Shinsou's mom speak, sees her mouth move and sees her smile, but he doesn't hear anything.

Izuku watches as Shinsou's father's face twists into a scowl. He can't hear what the man is saying, but he sees Shinsou turn on his heels, rolling his eyes dramatically as he turns and stomps off into

another room. Izuku can't see where he goes; there isn't a window that shows that room, but Izuku would guess it had to be Shinsou's bedroom. He watches as the father turns to the mother in the living room, the mother saying something with a frown on her face.

The man stands up quickly, gesturing wildly with his hands, and Izuku tenses up, waiting to see him hit his wife. He doesn't, though, just stomps off, out of Izuku's line of sight. He watches as the woman sighs, pulling her phone from off of a table beside the couch. It looks like she's typing on it. Izuku can't make out any other details, though, and it frustrates him. He'd get closer if he didn't already know that Shinsou, a hero in training, is a lot more likely to notice him than a random kid is.

I could just do it and then kill myself later, Izuku thinks to himself, but he pushes the thought out of his mind. He doesn't want to risk not resetting back far enough, doesn't want to risk Shinsou knowing about this even the slightest bit. Instead, he waits on the ledge of the roof, watching.

Shinsou's family seems quiet. They don't seem to interact with one another much, and Izuku doesn't see Shinsou come out of his room at all, at least not while the lights in the living room are on. He sees the mother on her phone, sees the dad sitting down beside her on the couch with his laptop, but he doesn't see them talking. It strikes him as strange, though, the way this is a *nice* apartment complex, the way the couch looks to be high quality, the way both of Shinsou's parents are dressed well, using expensive-looking technology.

It's not that Izuku thought Shinsou would be living in a dump, but Izuku can't shake what he knows about Shinsou from his mind, can't shake Shinsou not having eaten lunch before training because he can't afford it, can't shake Shinsou showing up without sheets. He'd thought that Shinsou's family must be short on money, must be going through a rough time, and Izuku knows that them living in a nice apartment doesn't mean they *have* money, but... it still seems strange, still sets off alarm bells in his head. Izuku swallows. He wonders what he would see, if he looked into Shinsou's room. Wonders if Shinsou would have all of the nice things that his parents seem to, or if his room would be empty, bare like his dorm room still is.

Izuku stays on the roof until all of the lights that he can see go out in the apartment, until he can't see a thing past the glass of the windows. When he uncurls himself from his position on the roof, his joints popping and protesting the movement, he doesn't feel any better. Even though he hadn't seen anyone *hit* Shinsou, hadn't seen anything that was *wrong*, really, he still doesn't feel right about it. There's something strange about Shinsou's family, something that makes Izuku's skin feel like it's crawling.

As Izuku climbs off of the roof, down the fire escape and into an alleyway, he can't shake the thought that maybe he's just being stupid. Maybe he's reading into this too much, seeing things where there's nothing. Maybe he *wants* there to be another explanation for Shinsou's injuries, one that doesn't mean it's Izuku's fault, one that doesn't have anything to do with the Gekkeiju.

Izuku doesn't sleep, that night. His mind whirls round and round until he's dizzy, keeping him up and weighing him down, and by the time it's morning, he feels like he's made of heavy, heavy stone.

Chapter End Notes

content warnings: implied/referenced abuse, suicidal thoughts, self harm mentions,

emeto (brief, non-graphic)

[discord!](#) [carrd!](#)

i hope u enjoyed!!!! think of shrimp in my honor <3

clean

Chapter Summary

last time: izuku stalks shinsou in a friendly way

Chapter Notes

sorry this is short im sick as fuck rn

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Rivera and Koizumi are the last to show up for the meeting, for once. Izuku doesn't think that he's *ever* seen that happen, and judging by the red tint to Rivera's cheeks and the way Koizumi is panting slightly, the two had hurried over. Rivera reaches up and pushes his slick, dark hair out of his face as he settles into his chair with a sigh, his brows drawn and his lips pursed.

"Took you long enough," Ren drawls from her spot beside Izuku. Izuku swallows, glancing over to see the unimpressed look on her face as she watches Rivera with a raised eyebrow. Izuku wipes his sweaty palms on his thighs, under the table, and wonders where Ren finds the confidence.

"Excuse our tardiness," Rivera says, like Ren hadn't said anything at all. "Our previous meeting ran long." He reaches up, loosening his tie and shrugging off his coat. Next to him, Koizumi unzips her trenchcoat and tugs her arms out of it.

"We've got good news, though!" Koizumi says, a smile on her face as she glances up and around the room. "We have the go-ahead to plan a raid for when the Gekkeiju tries to break you-know-who out of Tartarus, which means there's a timeline on when they'll be toast," she says happily, her cheeks dimpling. Izuku blinks, swallowing.

"That's great news," Mirko says, sounding a little excited but nowhere near as much as Koizumi. "Do we even know when they're doing that and where, though?"

"Not yet," Rivera says, and Izuku glances over to see Rivera's gaze fixed on Izuku. "The three undercover agents will need to gather information as to when the operation is taking place, where the Gekkeiju are meeting, and what they plan to do, exactly." He blows out a puff of air. "It would certainly be easier if Phosgene would allow Kojima to spend any amount of time near her, but that's to be expected."

"It's not--it's not Haruta's fault," Izuku says, swallowing. Rivera arches an eyebrow at him.

"Did I say it was?" he asks, voice dry. "I've been reviewing the recordings from the wires, and it appears that Phosgene is most trusting of you, Midoriya," he says. "I want you to find out as much about their so-called operation as you can without revealing your position as a spy," he says, his dark green eyes meeting Izuku's own. Izuku swallows, nodding shakily.

"I also have clearance to use my quirk if needed!" Koizumi says, raising a hand. "I'm not super

sure if it'll help right now, though," she says, dropping her hand to rub at the back of her neck, looking sheepish. "It'll be helpful if anyone gets away during the raid, though."

"What exactly is your quirk?" Nighteye asks from his usual spot beside Aizawa. He's been quieter than normal today, not chit chatting with Tsukauchi and Aizawa like he normally does before the meeting. Izuku wonders if something's wrong. Koizumi blinks, tipping her head to the side.

"I haven't told you yet?" she asks, seeming surprised. Beside her, Rivera sighs heavily.

"Her quirk is called Memory Walk," Rivera says, reaching up to pinch the bridge of his nose. "It's not particularly useful right now, but--" he starts, but Koizumi interrupts him.

"Can I just show them? They're not gonna trust us if we don't tell them anything about ourselves, you know," she says, a playful tone to her voice. Rivera sighs, waving a hand.

"Do whatever you want," he says. "It's not like this was an important meeting or anything." It's almost amusing to watch Rivera, who's been so cruel to Izuku and his friends, exasperated and annoyed by his coworker.

"Okay!" Koizumi says, and she reaches up with both hands, covering her eyes for a moment before pulling them away. When she does, the lighting in the room changes, going from bright and yellow to a cool purple shade, like a black light. Her eyes glow a bright shining blue, and all around the room, there are neon-bright footprints. Each set appears to be a different color, and as Izuku glances around, he can see that each of the people in the room have a different neon color in the irises of their eyes.

"It only works on a short range, but it moves with me," Koizumi says brightly. "I can't really see much other than the footprints when it's active, though, so I'll need combat-capable backup if we do end up tracking someone." She repeats her earlier motion, covering her eyes with her hands and then pulling them back away. As she sets her hands down on the table, the effect fades.

"I can certainly see how that would be useful in a pursuit situation," Nighteye says. "I, personally, am somewhat concerned with the safety of Midoriya, Shinsou, and Kojima during the operation." He reaches up, pushing his glasses further up the bridge of his nose. "Presumably, the three of them would need to be at the attempted prison break with the Gekkeiju, in order to keep up the front. They could easily be placed in the line of fire and harmed by either side," he says, his voice serious and low. Izuku swallows, and even though *he* knows that if something happens to any of them, Izuku can just turn back time, nobody else here knows that. Well, except maybe Haruta, but Izuku isn't entirely clear on *exactly* what Haruta knows.

"We'll be able to work out the details on that matter once we know more about the Gekkeiju's plan," Rivera says, glancing over to meet Nighteye's gaze. "I assure you the goal is to apprehend the Gekkeiju lieutenants and Phosgene with minimal casualties."

"Minimum," Ren scoffs quietly beside Izuku, low enough that Izuku's not sure anyone else hears until he sees Haruta glance at her, his ears flicking nervously. Izuku swallows, moving his gaze back to Rivera, who seems to be looking at Izuku again.

"We will be sure to have individuals with healing quirks available, as well as multiple teams of heroes, beyond just the individuals here," Rivera says, his gaze not leaving Izuku's. "Something like this should not be done on a budget, so to speak."

"Okay," Aizawa says, his voice dry and tired. "So, we need more information before we can plan anything else, but you've got the Commission's full support?" he asks. Izuku's not sure why he's

still in these meetings, to be honest, unless Rivera telling him he was off the case was just for show or something. Maybe the two of them met up when Izuku wasn't there, settled things. Izuku's just confused, frankly.

"That's correct," Rivera says, with a sigh. "The exact resources I'll have at my disposal will vary based on what, exactly, the Gekkeiju's plan consists of, but yes. The Commission is considering this one of their top priorities at the moment." His gaze seems like it's pinned to Izuku, tracking back to him over and over again. Izuku swallows, nervously.

The rest of the meeting is a blur. Izuku knows he should be paying attention, really, but he can't, not in the way that he's meant to. It's probably because he hasn't really been sleeping enough, but it's okay, because there's not much left to the meeting, anyway. Izuku sits through it patiently, steadfastly ignoring Rivera's searching gaze.

--

"How are you?" Sasaki asks as Izuku sinks onto the ottoman, the leather squeaking slightly under his pants. Izuku swallows, resisting the urge to wipe his hands against his pants and give away his own nerves.

"I'm--I'm okay," Izuku says, remembering Sasaki's fondness for manners. "Um. How are you?" he asks in return. Sasaki's lips curl up in a slight smile in response, and he notes the reaction for later.

"I'm well, thank you for asking," she says, her voice nearly a purr. Her eyes seem brighter green, almost, and Izuku thinks that it's strange. Her eyes shouldn't be able to do that, shouldn't change in brightness. Izuku supposes that he probably shouldn't be concerned about that, of all things. There's plenty of things about Sasaki that don't make sense; her eyes aren't what he should be getting caught up on.

"I have another mission for you," Sasaki says, leaning forward and folding her hands together. "I think it'll be quite fun for you, especially since I'm pairing you up with Haruta." She grins, showing the white, shiny edge of her fangs. Izuku blinks.

"What--what kind of mission?" he asks, because he knows Haruta doesn't really *go* on missions the same way he and Shinsou do. Haruta seems to be carried along to meetings, used as a spy, but not brought out into the open, not used to fight. Izuku thinks it's at least partially because Haruta doesn't have any combat training, as far as Izuku knows, anyway.

"You'll be scouting out a new supplier for us," Sasaki says, her eyes flashing with excitement. "The two of you will go with Sumire and Manami, who will of course be supervising." She licks her lips. "Think of it as a test run for the upcoming operation," Sasaki says, tipping her head to the side slightly. "Of course, for the real operation, it'll be you and Shinsou, but Haruta is necessary for this trade deal." She smiles, and Izuku nods.

"When do you--when do you think that we'll end up doing the big operation?" Izuku asks, trying to see just the right amount of curiosity for someone who's going on that mission. Sasaki seems pleased, if anything.

"I quite like you, Midoriya," she says, leaning back with a smile. "It's good to have someone interested in how things work around here," she says, and Izuku wonders if it's supposed to be sarcastic, if he's just missing it. Sasaki reached up, tapping a finger to her lower lip.

"Late January or early February, I think," she says. Izuku nods, swallowing. He's not sure if he'd thought it'd be sooner or later than that, but it's not what he was expecting. Sasaki seems to notice

this, her bright green eyes narrowing slightly.

“It takes a lot of work to plan something like this, you know,” she says, a hint of laughter in her voice. “Be patient, and it’ll be here before you know it.” She grins. “I do hope you’re enjoying the increased freedoms I’ve given you,” she says, a sly twist to her lips. “But don’t get too ahead of yourself, okay? I wouldn’t want to have to take away any of your privileges.”

Izuku recognizes a threat when he hears one. He nods mutely, and Sasaki just chuckles, like they’ve shared a private joke. Izuku’s mouth feels dry.

“You can go on, now,” Sasaki says, waving a hand to the door. “I’ll send for you a little later this week, to give you the details.”

Izuku slips out of the room. *February*, he tells himself. *I have to be patient until February.*

--

Izuku wakes up covered in a cold sweat, gasping and clutching at his blankets like they’re the only thing keeping him anchored to the world. His head is aching, pounding in time with his heartbeat, and when he reaches a hand up to scrub at his face, it’s covered with tears.

Izuku doesn’t think he can wait until February. He leans forward, wringing his hands tight in the fluffy material of his comforter, and he squeezes his eyes shut, pressing hot tears from them and letting them run down his cheeks. He wants to whine, wants to let the whimper that threatens to climb out of his throat fill the quiet space of his dorm, but he doesn’t dare. He doesn’t want to wake Shinsou, doesn’t want to add something to the other boy’s stack of troubles. He doesn’t want to make things worse, doesn’t want to wake Shinsou and disturb the little sleep that he--

Izuku’s thoughts freeze as he registers the sound of a wet snuffle. He pauses, holding his breath, but there’s no need to. Izuku leans back, against the wall he shares with Shinsou, and he presses his ear to it before he can think about it. He hears the sounds of someone inhaling sharply with a nose full of snot, hears the sound of someone groaning. Izuku swallows, moving slightly away from the wall. He flops back down onto his bed, taking in a wet breath.

It shouldn’t make him feel better, that Shinsou’s crying too, but it does. He hates it, feels like he’s *enjoying* Shinsou’s pain, the pain that Izuku put him in. He hates it, but it’s soothing nonetheless to know that he’s not the only one suffering, not the only one crying at an unholy hour of the morning. He doesn’t *want* Shinsou to be upset, doesn’t want to know his friend is in pain, but there’s something about knowing that it’s not just him, that he isn’t just being weak, that makes him feel better. He breathes deeply, turning his back to the wall he shares with Shinsou, and he keeps his eyes open, watching the shadows of his dorm room, until the sounds of crying slowly fade and he thinks Shinsou is probably asleep.

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It’s cold outside today in a way that Izuku can’t ignore, in a way that digs into his skin even through his thick coat and pants, even through his fluffy socks tucked into his boots. Izuku’s wishing that he had a scarf to wrap over his face, like the mask for his costume, but he’s on his way back from the tower and he’s wearing formal clothing under the layers, not his warm, soft costume.

It’s because of the cold that his fingers fumble as he tugs his phone out of his pocket, unlocking it and navigating to his contacts. His fingers feel numb, like they’re halfway frozen, but Izuku knows that they’re just the normal kind of cold. It’s almost funny to him, that he’s pretty sure he’s died of

hypothermia at least once before, but the cold still bothers him. He clicks the call button, pressing the phone to the side of his face and wincing at the cold of the glass.

“Hello?” Neito’s voice sounds higher-pitched over the phone, younger. Izuku can’t help the way his face splits into a smile as he hears his friend’s voice. It’s not the first time he’s called him this break, but every time, Izuku can’t help but grin like an idiot.

“Hey, Neito,” Izuku says, his breath puffing out into a misty cloud in front of him as he continues walking down the sidewalk. “How are--how are you?” he asks, hoping Neito can’t hear the way Izuku’s teeth are chattering.

“I’m good, what’s up?” Neito replies, and Izuku can hear shifting on the other side of the phone, like Neito’s settling into a chair or standing up from the couch. It’s hard to tell, really.

“I’m okay, just cold,” Izuku says, laughing slightly. “I-I hate this weather.” He hears Neito laugh, a little breath of air.

“The cold front is supposed to last about a week, so get used to it,” Neito says, a teasing edge to his voice. “You have warm enough clothes, right?” he adds, and Izuku feels his cheeks heat slightly at the concern.

“I do!” Izuku replies quickly. “My face and stuff always ends up too c-cold, though,” he says. He hears Neito hum in agreement.

“How are things going?” Neito asks, and Izuku bites his lower lip. He’d had a reason to call Neito, beyond just wanting to hear his voice, but he’s still nervous to bring it up.

“Um. Can you--will you keep this to yourself?” Izuku asks, fidgeting with his free hand, tucking it into his pocket. Neito snorts on the other side of the phone.

“Uh, Izuku, I’m already keeping a pretty big secret for you, remember?” he says, and Izuku can *hear* his friend rolling his eyes. Izuku swallows, giving his head a little shake.

“R-Right, I know that,” Izuku says. He pauses for a moment, and Neito doesn’t say anything, letting Izuku collect his thoughts. “I’m--I’m worried about Shinsou,” Izuku confesses, his voice sounding almost like a little squeak.

“Okay,” Neito says. “Why?” he asks, simple and to the point. Izuku swallows.

“He keeps--he keeps showing up with bruises and stuff,” Izuku says, lowering his voice even though there’s nobody around to hear, not with the way the sky is spitting tiny little shards of ice and whipping them around with a sharp, cold wind. “It’s not--it’s not the villains doing it, either. I think--I followed him home, and I didn’t *see* anything, b-but I think that--that--”

“You think it’s his parents?” Neito asks, his voice soft and concerned. “Have you told anyone about this?” Izuku hears footsteps, and he assumes that Neito is getting up and walking to his room.

“No, I--I didn’t want to, in case I was just reading into things too much,” Izuku says, swallowing. “He just--he was in his room when he went home, and nothing happened, his parents didn’t--they didn’t *seem* violent, but Neito, they’re clearly wealthy, and Shinsou--he didn’t even have *sheets*, when he moved in,” Izuku says, his throat dry, making his voice scratchy.

“Izuku, if you think his parents might be hurting him, you need to tell--” Neito starts, but Izuku cuts him off.

“I don’t want to make things any more difficult for him,” Izuku says quickly, his voice cracking. “I mean, I’ve already ruined his--ruined his *life*, and I don’t--what if I’m wrong? What if I just make things harder for him?” His voice comes out in a rush, all stressed and quick.

“Izuku, breathe,” Neito says. “I don’t--I’m not really well versed on abuse, to be honest, and I don’t think you are either, at least not from parents,” he says. “But you can get more information, right?” Izuku nods, before remembering that Neito wouldn’t be able to see the motion over the phone.

“Should I--do you think I should follow him home again?” Izuku asks, chewing on the skin of his bottom lip.

“No, you should *talk* to him,” Neito says, a sigh in his voice. “If he confirms it, then there isn’t any doubt. You might never follow him on the right night, at the right time, plus I’m not sure he wants you hanging around outside his window,” Neito says, chuckling lightly at the end.

“Okay,” Izuku breathes. “Okay. I can talk to him,” he says, squeezing his free hand into a fist and nodding to himself. “I can do that.”

“You’ve got this,” Neito says, then pauses. “Are *you* doing alright, Izuku? I mean, have you...” he trails off, but Izuku knows what he means.

“No,” Izuku says, too quickly. “I should probably go. The wind is--it’s picking up,” he says lamely, because he knows he can’t really lie to Neito.

“Izuku, wait--” Neito starts, but then a particularly strong burst of wind *does* blow, and Izuku hears Neito sigh. “Take care of yourself, okay? And if you need help--”

“I-I know,” Izuku says. “Bye, Neito.”

“Bye,” Neito says with a sigh. Izuku’s the one who hangs up, and he can’t help but feel a twinge of guilt in his chest as he shoves his phone back into the pocket of his coat.

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It’s still bitterly cold in a way that makes Izuku want to be at home, bundled up in blankets and coats, when he, Haruta, and Clean arrive at the meeting location to check it out before meeting with the weapons vendor. It’s in a hotel, which seems strange to Izuku, but he’s not really an expert in crime. *Not yet, anyway*, he thinks to himself as Clean stops to open the door to the hotel, tugging the glass door open and holding it for Haruta and Izuku.

“Go on in,” Clean says, giving Izuku and Haruta a grin. “It’s too cold out here!” Izuku swallows, stepping into the building with Haruta following behind him. It’s warm inside, the heater blasting Izuku at full force as he steps into the lobby.

It’s a fairly plain-looking hotel, nothing that fancy, but it’s not low-quality either. The lobby is tiled with a cream color, and the walls are painted off-white, decorated with green and white abstract paintings. Behind the front desk, there’s a tired looking young man with his hair in a bun and wearing a button down and slacks that must be his uniform. It’s oddly reminiscent of the Gekkeiju uniform. Izuku follows Clean as the man walks up to the front desk, his hands in his pockets and an easy smile on his face.

“We’ve got a room reservation until the name Tomorrow,” Clean says, and the guy behind the desk blinks, before nodding quickly.

“Oh, um, okay,” he says, turning to the computer and typing a few things. “Let me get the key for you,” he says, and after a moment, he opens a drawer, pulling out a plastic card. He hands it to Clean, his hands shaking a little, and Clean gives him a wink.

“Thanks, man. See ya later,” he says, giving the guy a wave as he turns and starts off towards where Izuku can see there are four elevators. Izuku exchanges a glance with Haruta, who gives him a look that Izuku is sure is supposed to convey some kind of message, but it’s lost on Izuku. After a moment, Haruta just sighs, turning his gaze back towards Clean where the man is pressing the call button for the elevator.

“We keep this room booked like, all the time,” Clean says, casting a glance over his shoulder at Izuku and Haruta, his white-blond hair flopping over as he does. “It’s pretty useful for meetings and stuff, so it’s like, something that’ll probably come up again, you know?” He turns back to face forward as the elevator doors slide open. “It’s the last room on the third floor if you turn left, I can’t remember the number,” he says, waving a hand as he steps onto the elevator.

Izuku nods, even though Clean isn’t facing him, and he follows him onto the elevator, his dress shoes tapping against the tile inside. It looks different from the elevator in the Gekkeiju base, shaped different with dark green walls and cream-colored tile floor, but it still manages to make him nervous, still manages to make him chew nervously at his bottom lip as Clean presses the button for the third floor, seemingly oblivious to Izuku’s nerves.

“This is, um, supposed to be a test run for the big one, r-right?” Izuku asks, shifting back and forth on his feet. “Are we--are we meeting here or something?” Clean looks over to him, eyebrows raised slightly in surprise.

“Oh, no, the actual meeting itself with the vendor is just practice for you kids being involved on like, a real important mission and stuff,” he says, laughing. “Today all we’re doing is making sure that the room is ready and stuff. We can’t exactly have housekeeping go in there, and we’ve had fights break out in a couple of meetings in the past, so it’s like, making sure there are no bloodstains, y’know?” Clean laughs, like he’s just told a funny joke. Izuku just swallows, nodding uneasily.

“He’s joking,” Haruta whispers, leaning closer to Izuku. “About the bloodstains.” He says it quietly, but Izuku can tell from the look that Clean gives them that the man hears anyway. Izuku nods, biting at his lower lip. He’s not super sure he finds the joke funny, considering that he’s *been* one of the Gekkeiju’s bloodstains before.

The elevator door slides open, revealing a hallway with brown floral carpet and beige walls. There aren’t any windows, and the artificial lighting in the ceiling casts the hallway with a sickly yellow glow. Clean leads them to the right without hesitating, humming a tune Izuku doesn’t recognize under his breath. The walk down the hallway is quiet otherwise, the carpet muffling the sounds of their footsteps as they move.

“Here we are,” Clean says as he stops at the last door in the hallway. The number is 321, written on the metal plate beside the door. Izuku watches as Clean swipes the card through the card reader, lighting little LED lights up in green when he does.

Izuku peers through the doorway as Clean pushes it open, stepping inside. It doesn’t look like what Izuku pictures in his mind when he thinks of hotel rooms, doesn’t have neatly made beds with clean white sheets and a TV. Instead, there’s a rectangular conference table, with wooden, uncushioned chairs on either side of it. The walls are plain and unadorned, and the curtains are drawn tight. When Clean flips on the light switch, illuminating the room in yellow light, Izuku can see that the curtains are nailed to the wall. He can’t help but shiver as he follows Clean into the

room, even though it isn't cold.

"Well, it looks exactly like I remember it does," Clean says with a sigh, walking forward and swiping a finger along the table, looking at it. "It's not too dusty, either, but we will have to clean it," he says, wiping the dust off of his gloved finger and onto his pants.

"We're--we're here to clean?" Izuku asks, blinking in surprise. Clean glances back at him, a slight grin on his face.

"I am the guy with the soap quirk, after all," he says, holding a hand up and wiggling his fingers. "Let me show you guys where the cleaning stuff is. All you'll need are wet rags." He turns, walking in quick strides towards the back of the room. He tugs open a door, revealing a bathroom. "The cleaning stuff is under the sink. I'll go ahead and get started." Izuku watches as Clean turns back to the table, tugging one of his gloves off.

"Um," Izuku hesitates, watching as Haruta walks over to the bathroom. "Why do--why are we the ones--" he starts, before stopping himself. He knows he shouldn't ask that, but Clean doesn't seem to be bothered at all. He just glances over at Izuku, blinking.

"Oh!" he shakes his head a little. "Yeah, it doesn't make much sense, does it?" Clean laughs lightly. "This room is one of the ones only a few people know about, so we have to clean it ourselves," he says, reaching up like he's going to rub the back of his head before pausing. "It goes quick, really. Better than cleaning up blood!" Clean laughs, and Izuku swallows.

"Right," he says, and they get to work.

Chapter End Notes

content warning: implied/ref child abuse

[discord!](#) [carrd!](#)

i hope yall are doing good I'm dying

void

Chapter Summary

last time: it's confirmed that they're going to try and take down the gekkeiju in the tartarus jailbreak, izuku asks for some advice

Chapter Notes

hi gamers i feel like this one sucks oop

sorry for missing the tuesday update!! i was still recovering from being sick

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

It's on their way back to campus, after they've left Clean at the tower, that Izuku thinks about asking Haruta. It's started to snow lightly, just enough that it's hard for Izuku to tell if it's actual snow or just a fine mist, but when he glances up at the sky, it looks like tiny crystals of spun sugar drifting down from the dove-grey clouds above. Izuku probably gets the idea to ask Haruta in the first place because the snow reminds him of that night, out in the trees, with the snow falling on his body as he died.

Of course, the moment Izuku has the idea to ask Haruta about it, Izuku sees Haruta's eyes slide open to him, his mouth stretching in a grimace. Izuku swallows. He doesn't know exactly what Haruta hears, but he knows that there's no point in holding off, no point in hesitating when Haruta already expects it.

"Um, H-Haruta," Izuku starts, swallowing. He reaches his hands up, tucking them into his armpits for warmth. "Do you--do you know if anyone at the Gekkeiju is hurting Shinsou?" he asks, his voice warped slightly by his teeth chattering. The wind is picking up around them, cutting right through Izuku's coat. Even with the weather, Izuku knows full well that the way Haruta tenses up, his jaw clenching tight and his eyes narrowing as they look over to Izuku, has nothing to do with the weather.

"You need to ask him that yourself," Haruta says, his voice low and quick, the same way it had been when he told Shinsou not to ask Izuku what he'd been thinking about when they walked to the tower with Shinsou for the first time.

"I-I'm just--I'm worried about him," Izuku says, swallowing. "I'm not trying to--"

"Not trying to invade his privacy?" Haruta asks, sighing. "I don't--I don't like to share people's secrets. Especially not ones that they didn't tell me in the first place." Haruta kicks at the ground as they walk, disturbing a fine layer of what might be dust or snow. Izuku thinks it might actually be cold enough for the snow to still be that fluffy, but he's still not sure.

"Makes sense," Izuku murmurs. "I--thank you, for stopping Shinsou from asking." He swallows, and next to him, Haruta sighs.

“I would stop him from--from using his quirk,” Haruta says. “If he just asked normally, then I-I wouldn’t do anything.” Haruta huffs out a breath. “You know, you should really tell someone. I don’t like keeping secrets, but--I don’t know exactly how your quirk works, but you’re going to *actually* kill yourself one of these days.” Haruta’s voice is low and tight, and when Izuku glances over to him, his arms are crossed tightly over his chest.

“It’s--that can’t happen,” Izuku says. He casts a glance around them, checking to see if there’s anyone who could overhear them.

“There’s nobody nearby,” Haruta says, quietly, and Izuku nods, facing forward again.

“It--when I die, it rewinds time,” Izuku says, watching the air in front of him as the snow starts to swirl down from the sky faster. “I can’t do it more than about seven or eight times in a row or I--I get sick, but I don’t think I can mess it up if I don’t do that,” he says. “You don’t--you don’t have to worry about me actually dying,” Izuku says. He wonders if he should be worried about *Haruta* dying, and he curses his brain for moving in directions that he doesn’t mean it to.

“It’s okay,” Haruta says. “I know that it’s not completely voluntary. Thoughts, that is,” he says, his voice quiet. “And I--I don’t think that I’m going to kill myself, at least not anytime soon,” he says. Izuku blinks, looking up at him, and he gives Izuku a weak smile. “I have to d-do something, to, um, to make up for all the stuff I’ve done,” Haruta explains, worrying at his lower lip with a too-sharp tooth. “I gave them so much information. I should--I should at least give enough info to the good guys that you and Shinsou can be safe again,” Haruta says, and Izuku swallows.

“After that, do you--do you think that you’ll...?” Izuku ventures, copying Haruta and biting at his lower lip. Haruta grimaces.

“I don’t--I’m not sure, to be honest.” He looks forward, at the ground. “Ema... I think it’d kill her, you know? And I just--I don’t want to hurt anyone else. I think that--that it’s okay, if I suffer a little longer if it keeps her happy.”

Izuku swallows and nods. He knows so many things that he *could* say, things that he knows are supposed to be comforting, that are supposed to make Haruta feel better, but he doesn’t think they’ll help when Haruta can tell Izuku doesn’t really believe them himself. Izuku could tell Haruta that *it’ll get better* or *it won’t hurt like this forever* and he might be right, but he won’t be *sure*. Izuku doesn’t think it matters, if he isn’t sure. If there isn’t a guarantee that things will get better, there’s no point.

“I’m--I know that what I do isn’t--that it’s not good for me,” Izuku says, swallowing. “And I--I keep doing it.” *I like it*, he doesn’t say. He knows Haruta hears him anyway.

“I mean,” Haruta starts, reaching up to fiddle with one of his ears. “Don’t they--don’t they say that the first step is--is knowing you have a problem?”

Izuku blinks, then nods. “Y-Yeah, I guess,” he says, shoving his hands into his pockets as they continue to walk side by side.

--

It’s late in the dorms one day, with the soft, warm lighting from the kitchen light leaking out into the living room where Izuku and Shinsou sit. Izuku’s phone is in his hand as he stares at it, but he hasn’t been reading the words on the screen in a while. Out of the corner of his eyes, he can see Shinsou, his face illuminated by the cool light from his phone. The colors flicker and move as whatever Shinsou is watching changes. Shinsou looks half asleep, almost, or maybe just bored, his

eyes half-lidded and his cheek smushed up against his face where he leans his arm against the armrest of the sofa. His legs are stretched out, taking up most of the rest of the couch. Izuku's the armchair next to him, curling up with his knees drawn in.

It's blissfully warm in the common room, and Izuku honestly just wants to let his eyes fall shut. He wants to curl up tighter into his chair and let himself drift to sleep, let himself slip into nothingness, but he knows he shouldn't. It's been a while since he and Shinsou were last together like this, with neither of them rushing to go out on a mission or patrol and headed straight up to bed. Shinsou looks almost *relaxed*; Izuku hates to ruin it, but he knows that he won't forgive himself if he wastes this chance.

"Shinsou?" he asks, his voice quiet. It's loud enough in the silence of the common room, and Shinsou looks up at him over his phone, quirking an eyebrow up slightly.

"Yeah?" Shinsou replies, and he even *sounds* tired. Izuku supposes that he can't blame him.

"Um," Izuku starts, chewing at his bottom lip. "Who's--I noticed that--that you've been hurt a lot, lately," he says, and he watches Shinsou's face drop as he talks but keeps going anyway. "And, uh. I know that it's not--that it isn't the Gekkeiju, so--"

"Drop it, Midoriya," Shinsou snaps. Izuku swallows.

"Who's hurting you?" Izuku asks, his voice cracking slightly. "Shinsou, I--"

"I said to drop it," Shinsou says again, standing up abruptly. "Mind your own fucking business, Midoriya," he snarls, before whipping around and storming out of the room, stomping over to the stairs quickly. Izuku watches him go, still curled on the armchair, and he feels sick to his stomach.

He doesn't know if he should go after Shinsou or not, doesn't know if it's the right thing to do or if it'll make things worse. He doesn't know if he should have asked more delicately, should have texted Shinsou instead, if he should have waited until morning. He doesn't know if he should have asked at all, really, but Neito had said that he should and Izuku doesn't know what to *do*. Izuku swallows, feeling tight and small, and he sits on the armchair like he's frozen in place because he doesn't know what else to do.

It takes him a long moment to stop feeling like he might cry, to stop feeling like he's broken something unfixable. He feels *wrong* for being upset about this--it's not like anything happened to *him*, not like anyone asked *him* a personal question. Shinsou wasn't even mean about it, all things considered.

Izuku thinks that, maybe, he's about to cry because he's frustrated. He swallows, unlocking his phone and pulling the screen back up to stare at it blankly. It's a long shot, and it's late enough at night that he might be asleep, but Izuku only really knows one person who might have experience with this. He swallows, navigating to his messages and opening his chat with Todoroki.

Hey are you awake? He sends, his hands shaking slightly. He's not sure if he should be doing this, if this is an invasion of Shinsou's privacy or not, but he doesn't know what else to do, doesn't have any idea.

Yes, comes Todoroki's reply just a few moments later. *Is everything okay?*

Yeah, Izuku texts back. *Well. Kind of? I'm worried about someone else but im ok,* he sends. There's a moment when the message isn't read, but as soon as it changes from *delivered* to *read*, Todoroki is typing.

Who? he sends, and Izuku swallows.

I'm not sure if I should say , Izuku replies. He pauses, then types out another message. *It's kinda personal.*

Ok , Todoroki replies. *You don't have to tell me. What's going on?* Izuku breathes out a soft sigh of relief, grateful for Todoroki.

I think their parents are hurting them , Izuku says. *I don't have any proof, but... they keep showing up covered in bruises after they go home.* He doesn't dare to say that he'd gone to Shinsou's house, that he'd seen his parents and the nice apartment and that Shinsou doesn't have *anything* , didn't even have *sheets* when he first came to the school. It'd give away who it was, would tell Todoroki who he's worried about.

I can't say for sure without seeing things myself , Todoroki says. *But if he's injured after going home it doesn't look good.*

Izuku types quickly. *I know. I tried to ask them but they got upset and told me not to ask about it*, he says. *I don't know what to do.* There's a long pause before Todoroki replies, and in that time, Izuku notices that his hands have started to shake, that he feels unsteady and cold. He hates the anxiety in his gut, in his throat and his hands. It makes him feel like he's on an unstable bridge, like he's in danger of falling at any moment.

I'm guessing it's different from my situation, Todoroki replies. *Living in the dorms helps me a lot so I would assume it's the same for them.*

They go home a lot tho , Izuku sends. Todoroki types for a moment.

I wouldn't want anyone to say anything about my dad, Todoroki says, *but if they're not the child of a pro...*

They're not , Izuku confirms.

You could tell Aizawa, Todoroki replies. *He seems nice.* There's a pause, then. *I don't know if this is the right thing to do, though* , he says. *I don't want to give you incorrect advice.*

Izuku nods, typing out a reply. *I won't blame you if it goes wrong*, he reassures Todoroki. *Is everything okay at your place?* he asks, belatedly realizing how hypocritical it is of him to be so worried about Shinsou when he *knows* Todoroki's family hits him, hurts him.

Yes, Todoroki replies. *He's fine as long as I train and spar with him occasionally. He's too busy for anything else.* Izuku swallows. He hopes that that means that things are *actually* okay, that Todoroki is actually safe, but... in some ways, Izuku thinks that Todoroki can support himself better than Shinsou can. Even if Todoroki's in a similar situation, Todoroki has grown so much since the sports festival, has stood up to his father and seems to be okay, most of the time.

Thank you for the advice , Izuku sends to Todoroki He gets a reply almost immediately.

It's not a problem, Todoroki sends. *And you don't need to worry about my father. I would be at the dorm if it was a problem. It's not like he can stop me from coming back there.* Izuku smiles slightly at his phone. He's not sure if Todoroki is being entirely serious, but he likes the thought that Todoroki is safe, that he has somewhere safe to go to if things get bad again.

Okay, he sends. *Goodnight, Todoroki* . After a moment, he adds another message. *I miss you. It's lonely at the dorms*, he sends, hoping that it's not creepy or something. Izuku isn't really used to

having friends to show affection to, to be quite honest.

I miss you too, Todoroki replies. *Goodnight. Sleep well*. Izuku breathes out and lets his eyes slide shut as he turns his phone screen off. He's not feeling *good*, necessarily, but he definitely feels a lot better than he had earlier. He just hopes that he can do something that will help Shinsou for once, rather than hurting him.

--

Izuku can't help but feel vaguely unsettled as he steps out of the elevator and into the lobby of the tower. Sasaki is unpredictable, unsettling. She'd been cold, distant this time when he met up with her. It's strange, how sometimes she's just nice, sweet, and other times she seems almost cruel. Other times she's neither of those things, and she just seems disinterested. This time, she'd been like that. She'd asked him for an update, given him some information on the upcoming weapons vendor ordeal, but that was about it. Izuku isn't sure that there was a *point* to the meeting, really. It'd lasted only about ten minutes, and most of that had been spent in awkward silence.

Izuku feels strange, when he's in the lobby. There's nobody else there that he can see, but he doesn't want to leave. The fact that the snow is falling quickly outside, the wind pushing it so it falls almost sideways, certainly doesn't make it look like it would be a nice walk back to UA. Izuku bites at his lip as he looks out the window, dreading the walk back.

He's also pretty sure that he's waiting for the other shoe to drop, that he's expecting something to go wrong. It's the day before they meet up with the new weapons vendor, and even though Sasaki seems unconcerned, even though Clean has been talking about it like it's a minor thing, Izuku can't help but worry about it. If it's meant to be training for the big operation, if it's meant to practice Shinsou and Izuku coordinating with Miura and Manami, then it doesn't seem like it can be something that goes well, not the first time through at least.

"Midoriya?" Izuku blinks and turns when he hears Manami's voice coming from behind him, by the elevators that lead to the basement. Izuku sees her stepping out of the elevator, her head tipped to the side and a smile on her face. She's wearing a pair of dark grey leggings and an oversized blue sweatshirt, and her hair is in its usual pigtails. Her smile brightens as they make eye contact.

"Ah, I've missed you!" she says, skipping over to Izuku with a grin on her face. "Are you excited for the mission tomorrow?" she asks, bouncing on her heels as she stops not far in front of Izuku.

Izuku blinks. "Uh, y-yeah," he says. He's a little caught off guard by her saying that she misses him, but after a second, it makes sense. *I've only been meeting with Sasaki lately*, he realizes.

"Good, good!" Manami says. "I bet that Sumimi is gonna be happy to see you again too," she says. "This mission is gonna be so much fun!" Her grin widens, and Izuku notes the heart shapes in her pupils.

"Do you... do you know exactly what's going to happen?" Izuku asks, swallowing to moisten his dry throat. Manami tips her head to the side slightly.

"What do you mean? Hasn't Mom told you?" she asks, her brows furrowing slightly. Izuku can see the exact moment she goes through the point where her emotions are at zero, the exact point when her pupils turn back to their normal shape.

"She's--she's told me a little," Izuku says. "I'm just--I'm a little nervous, is all," he says. Manami blinks, then laughs, shaking her head.

“Oh, you don’t need to be nervous!” she says. “We wouldn’t let you do something like this if you weren’t prepared, you know? You’re too valuable.” Manami grins, saying it like it’s the greatest compliment in the world and not vaguely unsettling. Izuku swallows, nodding.

“Um, t-thank you,” he says. “I’ll--I’ll see you tomorrow?” he asks, weakly, and Manami nods.

“See ya, Midoriya!” she says, raises a hand in a little wave before she turns and walks over to the other set of elevators, the ones that lead to the upper floors. Izuku takes a deep breath before turning to the doors that lead out of the lobby. He’s just as unsettled as he was a few moments before, only now it’s for a different reason.

--

The morning of the mission is a misty one, with the air on campus tinted white. The air feels crisp and cold, biting into Izuku’s skin, and the fog blocks a lot of his vision. Shinsou and Haruta are quiet where they walk to his left, walking under the UA gate and into the greater city of Musutafu. Izuku hasn’t really spoken with Shinsou since he tried to bring up his injuries, and he knows that Haruta’s well aware of the tension.

Haruta’s standing between the two of them, resolutely not looking at either of them and walking forward in quick, even strides. Izuku finds himself wishing that he hadn’t asked Shinsou before the meeting, wishing that he’d waited until afterward. He feels like an idiot, like he’s trying to make everything more difficult than it needs to be. He thinks that Haruta probably agrees, but Haruta isn’t reacting at all, so Izuku can’t be sure.

Izuku knows that it’s going to be a long day. He remembers the plans that Sasaki has told him in bits and pieces over the past few weeks, the little hints he’s been given, and as much as he’s still confused on some of the finer details, he knows that he won’t be getting back until late tonight. They’re on their way to the train station now, going to the Gekkeiju base where they’ll meet up with Clean and Miura and Manami, and then they’re supposed to all go to the meeting site together to wait for the weapons vendor to arrive.

Izuku’s not entirely clear on what, exactly, they’re going to do when the vendor *does* get there, but he assumes it has something to do with negotiations, that they’ll talk over terms or something. He knows that afterward, they’re supposed to go back to the tower, debrief on the situation, and then they’ll be free to go. Izuku isn’t looking forward to it. He wipes the palms of his hands off on the front of his pants as he walks, but it’s damp enough outside that it doesn’t really make any difference.

“You two need to--you need to talk to each other,” Haruta says, suddenly, startling Izuku out of his thoughts. Haruta glances back, but his head is turned to Shinsou instead of Izuku, and Izuku realizes that Shinsou must have been thinking about their argument.

“I don’t *need* to do anything,” Shinsou says, his voice monotone and low, almost like a growl. Izuku watches as Haruta rolls his eyes, turning back to face forward with a huff.

“There’s something going on with this *plan* of theirs, and I don’t like it,” Haruta says, his voice quick and low. “And I don’t want--I don’t want something to happen because you’re too busy not talking to each other,” he says. “So get it over with. It’s not like I wouldn’t find out later anyway.” Haruta’s voice is clipped, and he’s still not looking at either of them, his silver hair swishing behind him as he walks. Izuku opens his mouth to reply, but Shinsou beats him to it.

“What, we should put on a good show for you just because you’re going to hear us *think* about it later?” Shinsou asks, his voice heavy with sarcasm. “There’s nothing to talk about. You-- *both* of

you need to stay out of my business,” he says. Izuku swallows.

“We shouldn’t do this right now,” Izuku says, training his gaze on the ground. “Shinsou’s right. It’s--there’s nothing to talk about. I--I messed up, is all.” He squeezes his eyes shut for a moment, not long enough that either of them would be able to see, even though Izuku knows that Haruta will know just from Izuku thinking about it.

“What did you--what do you mean about something going on with the plan?” Izuku asks, looking up at Haruta, who glances at him briefly over his shoulder, his mouth set in a frown.

“I don’t know,” he says. “And that’s--that’s the problem. I should have heard more, by now. Nothing important, but people think about things they’re going to do a lot.” Haruta shakes his head. “I’ve really only seen Fury, and--and he doesn’t seem to even know what the mission is. It’s weird,” he says.

“That doesn’t make any sense,” Shinsou says, and Izuku is infinitely grateful that he’s helping with their conversation, even if he’s still angry at Izuku. “Why wouldn’t they tell him? He’s at the same rank as Manami and Miura, and even Clean knows what’s going on.”

“Exactly,” Haruta says, and Izuku can hear him blowing out a heavy breath of air. “I don’t know, maybe--maybe he’s just busy, or something. But we need to be on our guards. I don’t like this.”

Izuku swallows and nods. The conversation comes to an end as they turn the corner, stepping into a busy street filled with people walking into the train station ahead of them, but the nerves buzzing bright under Izuku’s skin only get stronger.

--

The front door of the tower is frosted over with mist, condensation that warps Izuku, Shinsou, and Haruta’s reflections in the mirrored glass of the front door. Izuku squeezes his hands into fists as Haruta opens the door without a word, holding it open and turning back to look at Izuku and Shinsou. Shinsou goes in first, and Izuku trails behind him, focusing on the sensation of his nails pressing into the flesh of his palms.

As he steps into the tower, he can see Manami leaning up against the counter where Yamamoto is at her usual seat. Manami is wearing a grey pleated skirt with a pair of thick, blood-red socks covering her legs and a matching red sweater. Izuku can see the collar of a white button-down shirt peeking out at her neck, and her hair is in the usual pigtails. She’s holding a metal baseball bat, humming and bouncing it against the floor with a smile on her face. Izuku wonders if it’s the same bat that’s been used to kill him before, or if this is a new one.

“They’re here,” Miura says, and Izuku turns to see her approaching from off to the side, near the doors that lead to the basement stairs. She’s in a dark grey suit, the metal rabbit ears that Izuku’s seen her in before already placed atop her head. Her platform boots give her a few extra inches of height, the metal shining in the bright lights of the room. Izuku finds his eyes sticking on the mask floating along beside her, though. It’s been so long since he’d seen her in her full costume, long enough that he’d almost forgotten what it looked like in the first place.

“Should I go get Cleany?” Manami asks, craning her neck back to look at Yamamoto. Yamamoto shakes her head.

“He’s just on his way back from the restrooms,” she says. “He’ll be here in a moment.”

“Sounds good,” Manami says with a smile, and when she turns back to them, Izuku notes that her

eyes are normal, that her quirk isn't active on her.

"You're ready?" Miura asks, eyeing the three of them. "I'm assuming that you've been briefed on what you're supposed to do." Izuku nods, swallowing. Next to him, Haruta speaks up.

"I'm--I'm there to use my quirk," he says, before his eyes dart over to look at Shinsou. "He's for if things go wrong. And Midoriya, he's--he's supposed to give us a warning," he says. Izuku watches the way Haruta's mouth slides into a slight grimace. Izuku's actual quirk won't really warn *him*, but it'll warn Haruta and the others in the end, so Izuku supposes that the Gekkeiju technically aren't wrong about the roles they're going to play.

"Yes," Miura says, nodding. "This kind of mission is high-stakes, but they tend to go fairly well. Vendors don't like to meet with our group if they're not serious," she says, her eyes skirting over to Izuku. Izuku wishes, briefly, that he could read minds in the same way that Haruta could, because then he might stand a chance at figuring out what that look is supposed to mean.

"So it'll go great!" Manami says brightly. She grins, opening her mouth to continue, but before she can say anything else, Izuku hears a door open from further down the hall.

"Sorry guys!" Clean calls, and he comes out, jogging lightly and waving a hand. "I didn't expect the kids to show up right when I stepped out for a second," he says, chuckling and shaking his head. "What'd I miss?" he asks, stopping a few feet away from Manami, beside the counter.

"Not much," Miura answers, sighing. "Let's get going. There's no point in waiting around here," she says, reaching up and pressing the mask to her face. Izuku swallows, watching as it covers her face from the mouth up. "I'll go ahead, since I travel faster and I'm more conspicuous. Manami, you know what to do when you get there," she says, turning and marching over to the door. Izuku watches as she pushes it open, stepping into the outside quickly. He swallows.

"You heard her!" Manami chirps brightly. "Let's get going, then," she says, her eyes moving over the group. She seems strangely lucid, more so than normal, and Izuku wonders, briefly, if she's sober right now. When Izuku slides his gaze over to Haruta, the boy nods, just the tiniest bit, and Izuku swallows. It makes sense, but he doesn't like the reminder that this is serious, that he'll be dealing with more criminals, villains that are an unknown. He doesn't like that he's helping out with something that might result in the Gekkeiju getting new and better weapons for their raid on Tartarus.

He follows Manami and Clean out into the streets again anyways. He trails after them as they start the trek towards the hotel, even though his heart is sinking as he does.

--

The hotel room is awkward and quiet as the six of them wait. They're sitting at the conference tables, with Manami and Miura in the center. Izuku sits beside Miura, with Haruta at his other side, and Shinsou is sitting beside Manami. Clean is by the door, standing with his thumbs hooked through his belt loops and his back leaned up against the wall. He's whistling softly, the sound filling the hotel room. Izuku thinks he knows the song that he's whistling, but it's slightly out of tune.

"They're here," Haruta whispers, just a moment before there's a knock at the door. Izuku swallows, watching as Clean grins, unhooking his thumbs from his pants and turning to open the door.

"Welcome," he says, a grin in his voice, and Izuku watches as a man with short, buzzed hair and a

scowl on his face steps into the room, clad in a navy blue suit. A jagged, deep scar cuts through his left eyebrow and eye, ending just above his lip. As he steps into the room, Izuku hears Haruta gasp sharply. Izuku looks over at him and sees an expression of pure shock on Haruta's face, but Izuku is distracted by the clicking of heels on the floor.

He turns to see a woman with medium length, straight black hair stepping into the room. She's wearing a suit, all black and neatly pressed, and about half of her hair is up in a bun atop her head. Her brown eyes are narrowed, glaring sharply at Haruta as she steps into the room and folds her arms over her chest.

"I-I can't hear," Haruta says, his voice breathy and sharp. Izuku glances over to him in alarm, and he watches as Haruta raises his hands up to claw desperately at his ears.

"I thought we were pretty clear," the dark haired woman says, her voice sharp. "I said no sensor types, no lie detectors and nothing else. Did you think we wouldn't *notice*?" she sneers, rolling her eyes. She steps out of the doorway, and a short girl with shoulder-length teal hair and bright orange eyes steps in, blinking. She's wearing a school uniform that's dark brown and white, with a teal bowtie at her neck.

"I think you got the right one, Void," she says, glancing up to the woman with dark hair. Void nods sharply, her eyes narrow as the younger girl tugs the door shut behind her.

"What did you do?" Miura asks, her voice hard. "We weren't informed about any requests," she says. Void arches an eyebrow.

"That's interesting, because your boss seemed to understand," she says, rolling her eyes. "It's whatever. Bad luck for him that it's tied to his hearing."

"Or good luck," the man next to her says chuckling. "I mean, you woulda killed 'im if not, yeah?" he asks, his lips quirking up into a smile. Void sighs, rolling her eyes.

"I'm sure we could have worked something else out with the Gekkeiju first," she says slowly, her eyes moving to where Miura is sitting. "You're Leadfoot, I suppose?"

Miura nods. "That I am," she says. "And you are?"

Void arches an eyebrow. "I'm the Lady of the Void. Sounds like your organization really needs to work on their information sharing, jeez," she says, before dipping her head to the man at her side. "He's Threadbare, and you can call the kid July." Void sighs, reaching up and tucking a strand of hair behind one ear. "You know, we really should just walk out of here right now," she says, "but since July picked up on it soon enough, I'm willing to talk anyway." Izuku swallows, his pulse thrumming in his fingertips. He watches Manami cock her head to the side slightly.

"What'd you do, anyway?" she asks. "I'm kind of confused, if I'm being honest." Her voice is light, but not as light as if often is. Izuku wonders if anything really upsets her. Watching Haruta grip his ears with shaking hands, his eyes wide and scared, is enough for Izuku to want to jump out of his chair, enough for him to want to draw the knives stashed in his belt. He doesn't, but it's a near thing.

"I took his hearing away," Void says, looking bored. "You don't need to know the details, but I'd assume you've heard of me, yeah?" Izuku watches as Manami nods.

"You can cancel others' quirks if they're tied to a physical attribute, right?" Manami asks, tipping her head to the side. Void nods.

“Close enough,” she says. “Can we get started, now? You should be grateful that I’m willing to continue at all, to be honest.”

“Ace,” Miura says. Izuku glances over to her. “Communicate to him what’s going on,” she says, nodding her head to Haruta. “He needs to stop freaking out. We still have a job to do.” Izuku swallows and nods, reaching his hand into his pocket to take out his phone.

“So,” Void says, leaning forward. “You want our help breaking into Japan’s strongest prison, right?”

Chapter End Notes

content warning: talk of abuse, shitty writing, and probably soemthing im forgetting

[discord!](#) [carrd!](#)

thank yall for sticking with this story :sob: we're getting close to the third superarc!!!

black eye

Chapter Summary

last time: izuku goes on the mission and meets some new scary dudes with new scary abilities

Chapter Notes

pogalicious my dudes

also im fully into mcyt now why am i like this. time to have minecraft as my special interest for the uhhhhhhh tenth (ish) time

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“So,” Void says, leaning forward. “You want our help breaking into Japan’s strongest prison, right?” She grins, a glimmer of her teeth showing. Izuku swallows heavily, but Miura doesn’t even flinch.

“Yes,” Miura says. Her voice is almost bored, with how calm it sounds, and Izuku doesn’t understand how she can be so relaxed. He doesn’t understand how Manami looks almost *happy* to be here, when Izuku feels like his skin is crawling with nerves, but at the same time, Izuku also knows that he can’t think about that for too long right now. He tunes out the conversation between the villains for now, reaching his hand into his pocket and pulling out his phone. He opens his notes app and types something out before tapping Haruta on the shoulder and holding his phone out to him, grimacing as Haruta flinches at the touch.

It’s one of their quirks. They didn’t want you reading minds, Izuku’s message reads. He can see Haruta’s eyes moving back and forth as he reads the message before he looks up and meets Izuku’s gaze with teary eyes, nodding. He doesn’t say anything, his eyes shifting to the side, where Void is crossing her arms over her chest as she, Threadbare, and July walk over to the table and sit down next to each other.

“Did your boss tell you about our asking price?” Void asks. “Or did she leave that out, too?”

“We were informed about the cost,” Miura says. “We’re willing to pay the full amount after the job is completed,” she says. Her body language is relaxed, calm. It’s like she doesn’t register the three as a threat, or if she does, she’s good at hiding it.

“No, you’ll be giving us half before and half after,” Void drawls, and Izuku can’t hide the tension in his own muscles. He knows that he’s shaking, and he can see the way July is watching him and Haruta with a curious expression on her face. Her eyebrows are teal, too, and Izuku distracts himself by wondering if that’s her natural hair color.

“You brought kinda a big team, huh?” July asks, cutting off whatever Miura was about to say. “I mean, I’m not sure I really get what you need all these people for,” she says, gesturing to Izuku and

then to Shinsou and Clean. “Unless you’re like, planning to fight us?” she asks, her eyes narrowing and her lips pursing in what looks almost like confusion.

“Oh, they’re in training,” Manami chirps, a pleasant smile on her face. “I wouldn’t worry about them too much. Plus, I don’t think there’s any need to fight! We’re good with paying half before, right Leadfoot?” She nudges Miura with an elbow, and Miura sighs.

“That’s fine,” she says. Void opens her mouth to reply, but July speaks first.

“Okay, but aren’t those two UA students?” she asks, waving a hand vaguely at Izuku and then at Shinsou. She looks at Izuku again, bright orange eyes narrowed in a squint. “And he’s like, the quirkless hero course kid, isn’t he?”

“He is,” Miura says. “If you believe everything you see on TV.” She sighs heavily.

“Drop it, July,” Void says, a hiss under her breath before she addresses Miura again. “We need a ten percent bonus for you violating our terms,” she says, jerking a thumb in Haruta’s direction. “If you’ve got a problem with that, then--”

“We don’t,” Miura says sharply. “That’s fine,” she says, “if the service you deliver is as good as you say it is.” Izuku can hear the challenge in her voice, and Void chuckles, raising an eyebrow and tilting her head.

“What, you think we’d come here without proof of our claims?” she asks. She smirks, leaning to the side and throwing an arm around Threadbare’s shoulders. “Why don’t you show them, Thread?”

Threadbare cracks a grin before reaching a hand into his coat, rustling around. Izuku glances over to Miura and Manami, expecting them to react, but they seem unconcerned. *Miura can stop bullets, Izuku remembers. It doesn’t matter if the other guys pulled a gun or something.*

When Threadbare pulls a hand out from his coat, though, there’s no gun. Instead, there’s a piece of white, thick cloth, the kind that Izuku’s seen in craft stores. It’s the sort that he thinks is used for embroidery, and sure enough, on the white fabric, there’s an intricately embroidered gun. It’s made of thick, shiny thread, and Izuku’s surprised at how realistic it looks for a moment. Threadbare seems to notice his gaze, because his blue eyes meet Izuku’s and his grin widens, showing slightly crooked teeth.

“Oh, you’re gonna love this, kid,” he says, and then he *plucks* the gun from the fabric. It pulls off like a sticker off of its backing, and as it does, it shifts and morphs into a 3D shape. Threadbare reaches forward, and when he sets the gun on the table, it makes a metallic, heavy sound against the wood.

“I can make just about anythin’,” he says. “I’ve gotta stitch ‘em first of course, but we’ve got a lotta stuff saved up, so that’s not an issue,” he says. His eyes move around the Gekkeiju’s team for a moment before stilling on Miura. “That good for you?”

“I think it’ll work just fine,” Miura says, and she smiles just slightly. “We’d be happy to pay the extra ten percent, and we apologize for the mistake on our part,” she says, inclining her head slightly. Izuku blinks. Her attitude seems to have shifted, now that she’s seen Threadbare’s quirk in action. Izuku isn’t sure if he should be glad or just worried.

“I’m glad to hear it,” Void says, her eyes narrowing and her head tipping to the side slightly. “I suppose you’ll want your mind reader returned to you in one piece,” she says with a sigh. “I’m not

particularly into the idea of having our minds read, though, so you'll have to wait until I'm out of range," she says, shrugging.

"That's fine," Miura answers with a sigh. "As long as he can still hear and use his quirk," she says, and Izuku thinks she's probably looking at Haruta. Haruta still has his hands clasped over his ears, pressing them down against his head. Izuku's heart aches for him, for the wide-eyed blank stare on his face.

"Is that all you need from us?" Void asks, rising from the table. "I'll be in contact, of course, and when we get a contract written up, we'll need to meet again." She pauses, her palms resting on the tabletop. "Of course, I'd prefer you didn't bring quite so many people next time. July has a point; it looks a little suspicious." Her gaze moves around the table, resting on Izuku's face for just a moment.

"Sure," Manmai says, a smile in her voice. "I can come with Leadfoot and Clean next time, if that's okay?" she asks. Void looks at her for a moment before nodding.

"Three and three," she says. "Sounds fair." Beside her, July and Threadbare stand up together, almost as if they'd coordinated it. Izuku wonders if that's part of July's quirk--it seems like she'd been the one to notice that Haruta could read minds, but Izuku isn't really clear on how a quirk like that would even work.

"We're heading out now," July says, giving a smile in the Gekkeiju's direction. "Pleasure doing business with you!" she says, raising a hand in a wave before she turns and starts towards the door. The other two follow suit, and Izuku watches as the file out the door. As Threadbare steps out behind Void and July, Clean walks forward, pulling the door shut with a hand.

"Let's wait to see when he gets his hearing back," Miura says, inclining her head in Haruta's direction. Izuku nods, biting at his lower lip. He's sure that Haruta notices all of their eyes on him, but he doesn't meet any of their gazes. Instead, his blue gaze is fixed on the table in front of him. Izuku watches, waiting, until Haruta gasps slightly, a tiny little sound that Izuku probably wouldn't even have noticed if he hadn't been watching Haruta. Haruta blinks rapidly, before looking over to Miura and Manami.

"It's, um--I can hear now," he says, his voice still shaking slightly. Miura nods quickly.

"And your quirk?" she asks. Haruta swallows.

"That's back too," he says, looking back down at the table. Izuku hears Manami hum sympathetically.

"Apparently we weren't supposed to bring anyone who could sense stuff," Manami says. "I wish the boss woulda told us, but I guess it's okay now." She looks at Haruta for a moment, tipping her head to the side slightly. "Do you want something to--"

"Manami, don't," Miura says sharply. It takes Izuku a moment to process the fact that Manami was about to offer Haruta drugs, probably. Izuku glances over to Haruta, who wraps his arms around his chest and shakes his head.

"I just want to go home," he says quietly. Izuku swallows, and he watches Manami nod and Miura sigh.

"We have to go back to the tower first," Miura says, "but after we report in, there's no reason to keep you. This is all we had for today," she says.

“Okay,” Haruta says, his voice squeaky. Izuku swallows. He hopes that Haruta will be okay, but he knows that there’s nothing he can do other than keep an eye on his friend until the day is over.

--

“This is bad,” Rivera says, his lips pressed into a thin line as he paces back and forth at the front of the room. Izuku can’t help but agree with the sentiment, but he doesn’t like the way that Rivera seems agitated, his voice sharp and his movements quick. It makes Izuku tense up, expecting something to go wrong, expecting someone to turn on him and hit him or *something*.

“We always knew this was a possibility, but it *is* unfortunate that it has happened,” Nezu agrees, his hands folded on the table in front of him. “The fact that they have access to weapons on this scale is... well, it’s not good, but I’m not sure it warrants this level of concern, Rivera.” Nezu seems almost amused as he watches Rivera move back and forth, but Izuku thinks he’s the only one in the room who feels that way. Aizawa and Nighteye have similarly grim looks on their faces, and Mirko and Ren are exchanging a *look*. Haruta looks like he’s not there, at least not mentally, his blue eyes fixed on the table in front of him, staring blankly. Shinsou is just watching whoever’s talking at the moment, his face blank and almost bored.

“I mean, the real concern is that they can get around Kojima, right?” Koizumi asks, puffing her cheeks out. “Lady of the Void is kind of notorious, and it’s really not great that she’s involved,” she continues, and Rivera nods sharply.

“Her quirk is very specific,” Rivera says. “And if what we heard over the wire was correct, it seems that their member July is able to detect any kind of sensing quirks.” Rivera glances over to Izuku. “Midoriya, you’ve described your quirk as seeing the future. Do you literally *see* the future, with your eyes?” His voice is sharp, demanding. Izuku swallows, shaking his head.

“No, it’s--it’s not really with my eyes,” he says, his voice weak. Rivera nods sharply, a tiny bit of tension leaving him.

“In that case, we might still be able to anticipate some of their moves,” Rivera says. “Shinsou’s quirk should be unaffected as well, but with the specificity of his activation requirements, we can’t rely on it in the event of an emergency,” Rivera says. He stops pacing, pausing for a moment before he sighs, walking back over to his chair.

“I’m concerned about Kojima’s safety if his quirk can be nullified,” Nighteye says, his voice dark.

“He should be fine, since these guys are on their side,” Ren says, shifting in her chair. “If they start working against the Gekkeiju, though, it might become an issue in the future,” she says. Izuku swallows, looking over to Haruta. The other boy glances up at him briefly, his lips pressed into a grimace, and Izuku gives him what he hopes is a reassuring smile. He’s not sure how well it works, but Haruta gives him the tiniest smile back, so Izuku supposes it isn’t a total failure.

“This is already a change in Void and Threadbare’s behavior,” Rivera says, drumming his fingers against the table. “Usually, those two try to avoid working with groups with goals that make them big targets.” Rivera sighs, shaking his head slightly. “And Phosgene normally doesn’t fail to communicate with her people, at least not with the information we have on the Gekkeiju. Something’s strange here.”

“Do you think she’s planning something else?” Mirko asks.

“I don’t know,” Rivera says, reaching up and running a hand through his dark hair. “I don’t like it, though.”

“She may be having a breakdown,” Nighteye says. “From what information you’ve given us, she’s highly unstable.” Izuku glances in his direction in time to see Nezu tap a paw on the bottom of his muzzle.

“Hmm, that could be,” Nezu says. “I don’t think we should outright dismiss her behavior, though. There’s still the possibility that she’s covering up for a plan, quite possibly the sort of mass-casualty scenario she’s infamous for.” Nezu still has his characteristic smile, which Izuku is pretty sure is just how his face looks, but it’s definitely smaller than normal, definitely less pronounced.

“We need to be prepared,” Rivera says, grimacing. “I’ll be in contact with most of you soon, but I need to talk to some people at the Commission about this,” he says, his gaze skipping around the room. “If Tsukauchi could be here next time, that would be good. I’ll need the police to help with this as well.”

“I’ll let him know,” Nighteye says. There’s a pause, a lull in the conversation, before Aizawa speaks. His dark gaze is on Izuku when he opens his mouth.

“We need to be careful of the kids’ safety as well,” Aizawa says. “I would rather they weren’t involved at all, but if there’s a chance of them being used as hostages during the jailbreak or of the Gekkeiju turning on them...” he trails off, and the room is filled with a heavy silence.

“Phosgene has no reason to suspect that they’re double agents,” Rivera says. “But we’ll keep that in mind.” His voice is clipped as he stands, the chair rolling out as he does so. “I need to get to work on this as soon as possible,” he says, and Izuku can see his brows furrowing, his face stretching in a grimace. He glances up, his eyes meeting Izuku’s briefly. “I’m going to try and get clearance to come on the raid myself,” he says. “And to use my quirk.” He turns, starting to march out of the room.

“What?” Aizawa asks, his brow furrowing. Rivera walks out of the room without looking back, and Izuku watches Aizawa turn to Koizumi as the girl frantically gathers her things and hops up to hurry after Rivera.

“Koizumi, what’s his quirk?” Aizawa asks, but Koizumi just gives him an apologetic smile.

“I’m sure he’ll tell you if he gets permission!” Koizumi says, and then she’s gone, too. Izuku is left feeling rather stunned in the conference room, and from the looks on everyone’s faces, he’s not the only one that feels that way.

--

Izuku knows, when he hears the door to the common area opening, hears the howl of the wind outside, that it’s Shinsou coming in. It’s late at night, long after Izuku had dinner with Aizawa, Mic, his mom, and the girls, and Shinsou’s been out all day, on some kind of mission for the Gekkeiju. Izuku isn’t exactly clear on what Shinsou’s been getting assigned, lately, but he assumes that it’s similar to his own tasks. Izuku’s been spending the days since the meeting with the weapons sellers getting information on the police and heroes and their quirks. It’s been surprisingly easy, although Izuku thinks that’s at least partially because Rivera and Nezu have been feeding him information with enough truth to be believable, but not to be dangerous.

It’s a Friday night, too, and while Izuku can’t be sure, Shinsou usually only goes home on the weekends, so Izuku’s fairly confident that he’ll be returning sometime tonight. That’s why Izuku’s camped out on the couch, watching old reruns of an All Might documentary on the TV when the door creaks open. Izuku sits up, fumbling for the remote and pausing his show as he looks over to the door. He squints as his eyes adjust to the dim light on the other side of the room.

“Shinsou?” he calls, and the weary sigh he hears confirms that it is the other student, after all.

“I don’t want to talk,” Shinsou says. His voice is almost hoarse, rough in the way that Izuku’s too familiar with. It’s the kind of roughness you get from being awake for too long, from breathing the cold winter air too much without resting.

“Are you--are you going home this weekend?” Izuku asks, his voice coming out rushed and high-pitched from his anxiety. Izuku watches as Shinsou leans down, taking off his shoes.

“I am,” Shinsou growls. “Not that it’s any of your business.” He slams his shoes onto the ground hard enough that it makes Izuku flinch, biting at his lower lip.

“I just--I’m worried about you, Shinsou,” Izuku says, and he tries not to sound like he’s about to cry because he really doesn’t think that it would help the situation at *all*. “I don’t want you getting hurt, and--”

“And I *said* that it was none of your business,” Shinsou snaps, cutting him off. “Jesus Christ. What does a guy have to do to get some peace around here?” he mutters under his breath. Izuku opens his mouth to reply, but he finds he can’t, not when Shinsou storms off and up the stairs, not even looking back once at Izuku.

Izuku has the growing sense that, of all the things he has going on in his life right now, this is the thing he won’t be able to handle on his own.

--

When Izuku next meets with Sasaki, he’s itching to talk to her. It’s a strange feeling, because he’s certainly not *excited* to see her, but he wants to get as much information as possible. He wants to *help*, to do something that might actually make a difference. He tells himself that it has nothing to do with how helpless he feels about the situation with Shinsou, but he doesn’t really convince himself.

“It’s good to see you one-on-one again,” Sasaki says as Izuku steps into her room, moving to the familiar ottoman. Izuku gives her a small smile as he sits. He’s not right on the edge of the seat, stiff-backed and scared like he used to be when he came to see her. It’s more comfortable, more familiar now, and Izuku isn’t afraid of Sasaki in the same way he’s afraid of Fury. It’s easier to deal with her, for sure.

“M-Most of our meetings are just the two of us,” Izuku points out. Sasaki smiles, quirkling an eyebrow up.

“So they are,” she agrees. “I’m glad that the mission went so well,” she says, her voice a purr. “It means that things are moving along quite nicely.” Izuku nods, and he doesn’t really have to try to look excited.

“Do you think it’ll happen earlier, then?” he asks. Sasaki tilts her head to the side just slightly.

“Hm, I’m not sure,” she says, folding her hands together and resting them in her lap. She’s wearing a long-sleeved black dress that Izuku’s seen her in before along with a lot of gold jewelry, which she seems to have on about half of the time Izuku meets with her. He’s not sure if there’s some purpose to it, or if it’s just for fashion.

“I’m, um, I’m just kind of excited,” Izuku says, which is absolutely true, just not for the reasons that Sasaki thinks it is. Izuku would really like for the whole Gekkeiju thing to be over with in general, and if things go well, they *should* be done with the Gekkeiju after the jailbreak. Sasaki

chuckles under her breath, smiling at him.

“You are, aren’t you?” She leans forward, her eyes half-lidded as she watches him. “I’ll be honest with you. I haven’t set the date just yet, but it should be decided soon.” She grins. “You have earned a reward from your last mission, though. If there’s any information you’d like for me, then it’s yours to ask for,” she says, spreading her hands and grinning so widely it scrunches up the skin under her eyes. Izuku swallows. He’s had a question in mind for a while now, and even though it’s probably not the most *useful* question for the mission and all, it’s something he has to know.

“What quirk do you want from--from All for One?” Izuku asks. Sasaki’s grin widens.

“Ah, I should have known that you’d ask about that,” she says, leaning back. She reaches up, brushing a lock of dark hair out of her face. “There are a lot of good options, you know, but there’s one quirk in particular that I believe he has.” She looks up and to the side, like she’s thinking of something far away, and she swirls the strand of hair around her fingertip. “I’m not sure of its name, but it allows the user to view others’ memories,” she says, her neon green eyes moving back to Izuku’s. “Well, not view so much as... copy. I’m sure you can see why that would be something I would want, what with Imposition and all.”

Izuku swallows. *If she can take memories, she can inflict anything anyone else has experienced too*, he thinks. *If she takes my memories...* He feels his pulse start to pick up in his veins, feels a thin sheen of cold sweat break out along his forehead.

“You could do anything,” Izuku says. “Without--without having to experience it yourself.” He swallows heavily. “Even--even things that you *can’t* experience.”

Sasaki nods, grinning. “Exactly,” she purrs. “If I found someone with the right quirk, I might even be able to use Imposition to kill,” she says, her eyes narrowing as she stares straight into Izuku’s eyes. “I’d have to be very lucky, of course, to find someone with an ability that lets them die and still be around for me to borrow their memory, of course.” She laughs slightly, and it’s all Izuku can do not to show his panic on his face.

“Y-Yeah,” he replies, his voice weak. “Very lucky.”

--

Izuku paces back and forth in the common area of the dorms. The wooden flooring is cool under his bare feet, smooth and polished, and the sensation of his feet slapping against it is grounding. It’s not quite enough to soothe the storm of anxiety brewing in his stomach, not quite enough to calm his nerves enough to stop pacing, but it’s something.

He’d started out doing this in his room, but the tiny bedroom proved to be too small for him to pace effectively, so he’d moved downstairs and hoped that, if Shinsou gets back while he’s doing this, that the other boy won’t judge him too harshly. Izuku’s pretty sure that Shinsou hates his guts right now, anyway, so it’s not like seeing Izuku having a breakdown in the living area will really make that any worse. At least, that’s what Izuku’s telling himself as he grits his teeth together and stomps his feet against the floor a little harder than is really necessary.

Sasaki could use my quirk to kill, his brain reminds him helpfully. Izuku swallows, and it feels like he’s swallowing sand and not spit from how dry his mouth is, but he doesn’t want to stop pacing to go and get a glass of water. It’s the only thing that’s helped Izuku tonight, and while he *knows* that it’d make him feel better if he killed himself or cut himself, he doesn’t want to use his quirk, not when he’s just learned that Sasaki could commit *mass murder* using his memories, if she gets to All for One before the Commission and the heroes and the police can stop her. It would feel

wrong.

Izuku can't deny that it's tempting, though. He'd like to go up to his dorm room, grab a knife--there's one in particular with a thin, long blade--and go for a walk in the woods. He'd like to sit out in the cold, let the air numb his fingers, and bleed out into the icy ground. It hasn't snowed in a bit, but it's still bitterly cold, with thin layers of slick ice over everything, and Izuku thinks that, if he stayed dead when he died, his blood would freeze over, too.

Izuku's startled out of his thoughts by the sound of the door opening. He jumps nearly a foot in the air, whirling around and settling into a fighting stance before he can even register the movement. He's sure he looks like he's going crazy, like he's a wild animal or something, and when it's Shinsou staring back at him with wide eyes, Izuku can't help the pang of embarrassment he feels in his chest. That is, before he notices the dark, swollen bruise around one of Shinsou's eyes.

"You were *waiting* for me?" Shinsou asks incredulously, his voice loud, a mix of confused and angry. "What the fuck, Midoriya?" Izuku swallows, shakes his head.

"Not, I--I wasn't, I just--I needed to get out of my room," he explains, gripping one hand with another and squeezing. His legs feel strange from the rapid-fire pacing he'd been doing, and he wants to keep moving but he knows it would be rude. "Shinsou, what--what happened to your face?"

"Nothing," Shinsou answers, far too quickly. "Nothing happened to my face." He looks Izuku up and down, before starting towards the stairs. "I'm going to bed," he says, his voice curt. Izuku wonders how much of it is frustration with Izuku and how much of it is exhaustion; even on the uninjured side of Shinsou's face, there's a dark bag under his eye.

"Shinsou, you went--went to your parents' place," Izuku says, following him as he marches off to the stairs. "And you have a black eye," he says. He can hear the pleading tone in his own voice, can hear the way he's *begging* Shinsou to just tell him what happened.

"Don't," Shinsou says, a warning in his voice. "Leave me the fuck alone." His voice has so much bite to it that it almost stops Izuku from starting up the stairs behind Shinsou.

"M-My room is this way too," Izuku points out, and he hears Shinsou huff out a heavy sigh. "Shinsou, if they're hurting you--"

"What part of *don't* isn't clear enough for you?" Shinsou snarls, his hands clenching into fists at his sides. "Are you just going to keep asking me until we graduate?" he asks.

"No, but--" Izuku starts, but he feels the familiar hold of Shinsou's quirk take over him, dulling his senses. His body stops on the top of the stairs as Shinsou walks down the hall, to his door.

"Go to your own room, shut the door, and *leave me alone*," Shinsou says. There's something exhausted in his voice under the pull of the quirk, something defeated. Izuku's body starts moving of his own volition, and he can't quite see Shinsou in his peripheral vision, but he hears the boy's door open and close as Izuku's body numbly moves to unlock his own door. *He's gotten much better with his quirk*, Izuku realizes, noting the way his body opens the door and even sets the key back into his pocket where it belongs. Izuku's body shuts the door, and he feels the quirk dissolve, but he doesn't move to leave his room.

Instead, Izuku stares at the door closed in front of him. He stares at the door and he listens, hears the sound of someone shoving things around in the room next to his, hears a frustrated shout and the muffled sounds of angry tears. Izuku hears what he's sure Shinsou would rather Izuku didn't

know about, what he's probably been trying to keep hidden from Izuku for a long time now.

Izuku realizes that he doesn't need Shinsou to say that his parents are the ones doing this. He doesn't need that confirmation, not when there's no other way for Shinsou to have gotten that black eye. Not when Shinsou's reacting like this, not when he hadn't even really denied that it was his parents, not tonight at least. Izuku sits on the edge of his bed, staring blankly into the space of his room.

I have to tell Aizawa, he thinks to himself.

Chapter End Notes

content warning: abuse, mentions of suicide/self harm

[discord!](#) [carrd!](#)

i hope u enjoyed!!!! yall i am SO ready for summer break it's so close.... once the semester ends I might even go back to daily updates :3c

tattletale

Chapter Summary

last time: izuku gets some scary fucking info then sees shinsou with a black eye and decides to be a snitch

Chapter Notes

hello my pogchamps i am a gamer a minecrafter an mgl pro if u will

jk i suck at games that's why I'm gonna be a scientist B)

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Izuku waits until the next morning. He tells himself that it's because he doesn't want to wake Aizawa up so late, but he knows that it's at least partially because he's nervous to tell him at all. It's not the same kind of nerves that he'd had before, the kind that make Izuku wonder if he should tell Aizawa at all. Rather, Izuku *knows* he needs to tell her teacher, he knows it and even so, he's afraid of what will happen after. As much as he's already destroyed his friendship with Shinsou, he knows that this will be the final straw.

It's deceptively quiet and calm as Izuku pushes open the door to the outside. The sun is shining, despite the chill that still hangs in the air, and Izuku has to squint while his eyes adjust to the glow of the bright morning sunshine. He starts down the stairs, his shoes making soft noises against the concrete.

Not for the first time, he wishes that the faculty lived in the same building as he and Shinsou did. He knows that it's impractical for when school is in session, but it seems silly during the break. That, and Izuku *knows* that Aizawa would have figured out what's going on with Shinsou on his own if they were living in the same building. It's one thing to wear makeup to dinner, one thing to only go to see the teachers when he's looking just fine, and it's another thing entirely to sneak back into the building without any of the injuries showing.

Izuku doesn't think that *anyone* would have missed it, if they'd been paying any attention at all. He tries to comfort himself with this fact as he steps onto the sidewalk, breathing in the sharp chill of the air. He tells himself that he's only doing what anyone else would have in his situation, that this is something that needs to happen. That even if Shinsou hates him after, it'll be okay because Shinsou won't be getting hit by his parents, won't be going home to get hurt after spending the day working for villains. Izuku tells himself that it's just what has to happen, but that doesn't stop his traitorous brain from whispering to him that if not for Izuku, Shinsou wouldn't be working with the villains in the first place.

Izuku hopes that Aizawa's actually *in* the dorm. It's probably about ten in the morning, just because Izuku didn't really want to wake Aizawa up. He wanted to wait until Shinsou had left, too, in case Shinsou had figured out what he was planning to do and decided to stop him himself. Izuku's not sure that he would have the resolve to go through with this if Shinsou *had* tried to stop

him, to be honest. It's already taking most of his strength to twist the doorknob and pull open the door to the faculty dorm.

The lights are on in their common room, and the smell of cooking sausage hits Izuku immediately. He blinks when he sees Present Mic in the kitchen, with Aizawa sitting at the dining table nursing a cup of coffee. Izuku hadn't expected there to be anyone else here, and now he's not sure what to do. Belatedly, he realizes that Mic and Aizawa are both looking at him expectantly. Izuku pulls the door shut behind him and swallows.

"Aizawa-sensei, can I--can I talk to you?" Izuku asks. His throat feels dry, and his voice comes out squeaky. Izuku watches as Aizawa's brows furrow ever so slightly, and he sets his mug down on the table with a soft clink.

"Of course," Aizawa says. "What is it?" His eyes are focused on Izuku, so Izuku knows he sees when Izuku flicks his gaze over to Mic.

"Um. I-In private, if that's okay," Izuku says, resisting the urge to chew on his lower lip. He knows that Aizawa doesn't like the habit. He sees Aizawa and Mic exchange a glance, and Izuku can't help but feel a little guilty. It's not that he doesn't trust Present Mic; he just doesn't want to share Shinsou's private information with more people than is absolutely necessary. Izuku watches as Aizawa and Mic exchange a glance before Aizawa nods, standing up from the table.

"There's a small room on this floor, or we can go to my room," Aizawa says. "Whichever works better for you." Izuku can tell that Aizawa thinks he's nervous, thinks that he's about to run at any moment, if Aizawa spooks him or if something happens. Izuku thinks that's not true, but he can't be sure.

"Th-this floor is okay," Izuku says, mostly because he thinks he might lose his nerve if he waits much longer. Aizawa nods, turning and walking quickly. He leaves his coffee cup behind, and Izuku can't help but stare at the half-full white mug as he walks past the table, following Aizawa towards a small door at the back of the room, near the stairs. Izuku wonders if the coffee will have gone cold by the time he and Aizawa are back.

Izuku listens to the door latch clicking as it opens. He steps into the room, pulling the door shut behind him, and it makes the exact same noise as it shuts. The room looks like any other conference room he's seen on campus, with carpeted floor and grass-green armchairs facing each other, except the ceiling on one side is sloped. Izuku thinks that's probably because of the stairs. It gives the room a cramped, claustrophobic feeling, and even though Izuku *isn't* afraid of small spaces, he feels his heartbeat pick up in his chest.

"Is everything okay?" Aizawa asks, turning to look at Izuku. His brows are furrowed, his mouth stretched out in a frown, but he doesn't sit. Izuku doesn't, either, and the two of them just stand facing each other by the door.

"No," Izuku says, and he has to pause to swallow. "I think--I think that--that Shinsou's--that he's," Izuku opens his mouth to say more, but he can't force any words out. Instead, a tiny squeak escapes him, and he sees Aizawa's frown deepen.

"Take a deep breath, Midoriya," Aizawa says, stepping towards him like he wants to put a hand on his shoulder. "Whenever you're ready." Izuku can tell, despite his words, that Aizawa is anxious to hear what Izuku's going to say. Izuku swallows, shuts his eyes for a moment, and clenches his hands into fists. It doesn't stop the burning of anxiety in his throat, doesn't stop the way his stomach is rolling, but it helps focus him at the very least.

“I think that Shinsou--I think his parents are hitting him,” Izuku says, his voice barely audible. He knows that Aizawa hears him, though, because his eyes widen and his mouth opens just the tiniest bit.

“What--how do you know?” Aizawa asks, his brows dropping and his mouth stretching in a grimace. Izuku swallows.

“I-I know that--that the Gekkeiju aren’t hurting him,” he says, moving his gaze to the floor. “And everytime he gets hurt it’s--its after, um, he visits his parents.” Izuku swallows. “He wouldn’t admit it, but he--last night, he came home with a black eye.” There’s a moment of silence, and Izuku keeps his gaze fixed firmly on the carpet.

“After he visited his parents,” Aizawa says slowly. Izuku nods, and he hears Aizawa curse under his breath.

“I-I’m not sure, but I--I didn’t want him to--to keep getting hurt,” Izuku explains, looking up to Aizawa. “He doesn’t--he didn’t want me to--to know, I don’t think, so he’s--he’s going to me mad, sensei.” Izuku sees the sharp concern and anger on Aizawa’s face, and it makes him shake even though he knows Aizawa isn’t angry at him.

“You did the right thing by telling me,” Aizawa says, but he sounds almost distracted. “Fuck. How did I miss this?” he asks, more to himself than Izuku, but Izuku swallows and replies anyway.

“He--he wears makeup,” Izuku says. “To cover the bruises. I don’t think--I wouldn’t have noticed, if it wasn’t just--just the two of us in the dorm.” Izuku knows it’s true, too, because even though Shinsou hardly went home during the semester, surely there had been signs. Surely there had been something that Izuku missed earlier on, just like he missed that Haruta was working with the Gekkeiju, just like he missed that the Gekkeiju wanted to take Shinsou at all.

“It’s not your fault, Midoriya,” Aizawa says, reaching up to run a hand through his messy curls. “You did the right thing.” He breathes, in and out. “Okay. Let’s walk back over to the dorms. Shinsou’s still there, right?” he asks, his eyes moving to Izuku. Izuku nods hesitantly.

“I don’t--I don’t want to--he’s going to be upset,” Izuku says, squeezing his hands until he can feel the bite of his nails in his palms. Aizawa blinks, then seems to understand.

“You won’t be there for the conversation,” Aizawa says, shaking his head just the smallest bit. “I want to walk you back to your room, though.” He sighs, his eyes sliding shut. “I need to talk to Shinsou immediately.”

“Right,” Izuku says, weakly. Aizawa seems to take that as permission, moving to the door and opening it once again. Izuku follows him out, his hands shaking at his sides. He doesn’t miss the way Present Mic shoots them a worried look, but Aizawa just shakes his head and Mic doesn’t say a word, looks away and goes back to cooking.

Secretly, Izuku wants to ask Aizawa if he can stay here instead, if he can go find his mom and the girls and help with their homeschooling. He wants to ask for that distraction, to be far away from what’s about to happen, but he doesn’t dare. Aizawa is already marching over to the door that leads outside, and Izuku follows him with dread so heavy it feels like he’s suffocating.

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Izuku can only stand it for about half an hour before the sounds of Aizawa and Shinsou arguing starts to get to him. It’s not that he doesn’t understand Shinsou’s outrage, not that he wouldn’t be

just as upset and angry if someone told *his* secret to his teacher. It's not that he doesn't understand Aizawa's frustration, not that he doesn't understand the angry kind of concern that his teacher is feeling.

The thing is, Izuku hates knowing that this is all his fault. Sure, it's not his fault that Shinsou's getting hit by his parents in the first place, but it's certainly his fault that Shinsou's arguing with Aizawa about it now. Izuku can't make out the words, exactly, even through the dorm wall, but it's still clear that it isn't a happy conversation. Every time he hears Shinsou's voice, rough and angry, he winces. Every time that Aizawa snaps back at Shinsou, Izuku flinches. He feels like he's listening in on something private, for one thing, but the tension alone is enough to make his hands shake even without the guilt.

Izuku tries to move quietly as he stands up from his bed, shuffling his socked feet against the wooden floor. He knows this is the kind of thing that would upset Aizawa if he knew about it, but Izuku reassures himself that, while this isn't necessarily *good* for him, it's probably better than just outright killing himself. He slips out of his room, shutting and locking the door behind him, and he's thankful that the two in the room next door don't seem to hear him, or if they do, they don't react.

Their voices grow fainter and fainter as Izuku trails down the hallway, walking to the stairs slowly, quietly. He's not sure if he's actually *trying* to catch some of their conversation or not, and he tries to reason with himself that there's no reason to stall, not when listening to them fight is making him feel awful. He ignores the part of him that whispers that he *should* feel awful, that he should keep listening *because* it's making him feel worse.

The stairs don't creak. The building is too new, too recently constructed for something like that, but Izuku treads carefully nonetheless. It's uncomfortable, the way that Shinsou and Aizawa's voices are getting more and more distant but not any less angry. Izuku thinks they may be getting more upset, actually, but he tells himself that it's none of his business and that he should give them some privacy. He tells himself that he needs to get over himself. That this is his fault, and he has no right to feel this badly about it.

Izuku moves faster, once he's out of earshot. The common area is quiet, and it smells like unwashed dishes, and it pushes him out of the building in a way that the sounds of shouting hadn't. He doesn't like the reminder that things were normal, before he ruined them. He doesn't like the reminder that, in telling Aizawa, Izuku may have just ruined Shinsou's last safe place.

It's cold outside. It's a little warmer than when Izuku had gone to see Aizawa earlier, but not warm enough that the long sleeved shirt and sweats he's wearing can keep him warm. He wraps his arms around himself and hurries down the stairs, the cold seeping through his socks too quickly. His fingers and toes burn with the cold, and his eyes burn with the bright light of the sun. Izuku all but runs to the woods, to the cool, comforting shade of the pine trees.

It's colder in the forest, but it's not as bright and the ground is soft, almost slick under his socks. Izuku wonders if the pine trees shed more of their needles in the fall and winter, or if it's even year round. The needles still on their branches are a deep emerald, stained with brighter green and yellows where the sunlight passes through them, but the ground is covered in a carpet of amber colored pine needles. It's soft enough that Izuku's comfortable in his socks, and it might even be pleasant if it weren't so cold. That, and Izuku is fairly certain he's one step away from a panic attack with the way his breaths are coming unevenly. His heart is pounding in his chest, too, far too fast for the small amount of exercise that running down the stairs was.

Izuku finds his way to that hollowed-out tree. He knows the way intimately, knows it so well that

he thinks he could probably end up there even if he were blindfolded and hopping on one leg. The forest sort of naturally heads in that direction, too, with places on the ground that are free of undergrowth making a natural path. Izuku thinks it might be an old deer path, or maybe it *was* one, a few months ago. It's not in use now, though, judging by the way that the greenbriar that creeps over the forest in places has started to invade the path. Izuku steps over it, grimacing as he thinks about how much it'd hurt if he'd stepped on it barefoot. He then wonders if he could kill himself using greenbriar and promptly decides to stop thinking about sharp things at all.

The hollowed out tree looks different than it had the last time Izuku saw it. Izuku shouldn't be surprised, really; it's in nature, so it's bound to change. He thinks that, maybe, he just wasn't expecting so much of the dark black char from the lightning strike to have faded, for so much of the burned pieces to have disappeared. There's nothing on the ground to suggest that chunks have broken off, but the lightning-scarred tree is smaller than before. The hollow in the center looks the same, though, and Izuku creeps over to his tree. There's nothing in it, of course--Izuku had moved all of his things when Aizawa had found out about his identity. It's still nice to be able to look down into it and find something that looks familiar.

The clearing is different, too, with less of the weeds and grasses and more of the dark soil showing. Izuku thinks that it's a little damp, but it's hard to tell as he sits down. It could just be the cold, leeching his warmth from him and making him think that it's wet. He doesn't care, either way.

Izuku sits under the hollowed out tree, shutting his eyes against the bright sun that fills the clearing. He's shivering, of course, because it's far too cold for him to be doing this. His fingers and toes are numb, and he knows that if he opened his eyes, he'd see his breath puffing out around his face in a cloud of silver mist, but he doesn't want to move.

After what might be minutes or hours, Izuku feels the skin of his face growing warm from the sun. It's just where the sun's rays hit directly; the rest of him is growing colder, and the tip of his nose still feels like an icicle. It's nice, though, and the sting of the cold mixed with the sharp heat of the sun helps to ground him, focus him. He feels more calm right now, with the sun shining on him and his teeth chattering to an empty clearing, than he has in ages.

Izuku stays there for far longer than he should. He can see the glow of the sun through his closed eyes, dyeing the back of his eyelids a bright red, but he doesn't move even when a cloud passes over the sun and he grows a few degrees cooler. He doesn't move until he's shaking so hard that his jaw aches from his teeth chattering, until his toes start to feel like they're going to fall off. That's when he stands up, lurching to his feet shakily and blinking in the sunlight.

Izuku could kill himself like this. It wouldn't be the first time that he's let himself die from the cold, wouldn't be the first time that he'd done it on purpose. He knows he's already through the worst of it, too; his fingers are already numb, and the shivering is starting to slow. He knows that, if he were to sit back down now, he would pass slowly, peacefully. He would die in that safe contrast between the winter sun and the frost in the air.

He doesn't think it'd be fair, though. Whatever Shinsou is dealing with right now, he can't just kill himself to feel better. He probably can't even be alone, not with the way Aizawa worries about them. Izuku thinks that he owes this to Shinsou at the very least. If not Shinsou, then surely, he owes it to Aizawa, who would stop Izuku if he knew. Izuku owes it to Neito, who's been trying to stop him for ages, to Kacchan, who doesn't even know. Izuku starts to walk back to the dorms, his head clear and his body aching.

--

Shinsou doesn't show up to dinner that night. Izuku should have expected it, really. He should

have known that things would change if he told Aizawa, should have known that Shinsou wouldn't want to be around him right now, but it doesn't soften the blow when he sits down at the table and Shinsou's spot is empty. He can tell from the way Aizawa watches him with careful eyes as his mom distracts the girls that Aizawa is concerned about him. Izuku wishes he wasn't.

"Did you have any missions today, Izuku?" his mom asks, and Izuku snaps his head up to look at her. She's got a gentle smile on her face, and Izuku realizes that Aizawa must have told her and Mic *something*, because they're way calmer than normal, way lower-energy. Izuku isn't sure if he appreciates it or wishes that they'd be their normal selves.

"N-No, I'm just going to patrol tonight," he says, looking down at the steaming bowl of stew in front of him. It smells delicious, but Izuku doesn't really want to eat.

"Oh, well be careful!" his mom says. Beside her, Mouse nods.

"Remember to look both ways before you cross the street," she says, very seriously. "Izuku will get hurt if a car hits him." She's been talking more, and Izuku wishes that he'd been spending more time with her. It's something that he'll have to do after the raid, he thinks.

"I'll be careful, Mouse," Izuku says, giving her a soft smile. She returns it with her own version, which is really more of just a grimace, but it makes Izuku's heart swell nonetheless. It's amazing to see her like this, acting like a *kid*, and it's such a stark contrast to the way that she'd been back at the tower. Beside her, Eri is staring sleepily down at the table, her head nodding slightly.

"Eri," Inko says, nudging her gently. "Don't fall asleep in your food! If you're tired, I can put it away and you can sleep for now?" she asks, leaning down to look at the silver haired girl. Eri looks up at her, blinking.

"M awake," she says before raising two fists to rub at her eyes. "I wanna eat before I sleep."

"Eating gives Mouse energy," Mouse says, scooping up a bite of stew and shoving it in her mouth. "Eri will be *way* more awake after dinner," she says, her mouth still full of food. Izuku has to suppress a snicker, settling for just smiling instead. His mom sighs.

"Mouse, try to chew with your mouth closed, okay?" Inko says, her voice still soft. Mouse looks over to her and nods excitedly, shutting her mouth and swallowing her mouthful of food before immediately digging back into her bowl of food. She looks far less thin than she had back at the tower, Izuku realizes, and her hair is shinier, thicker. She almost looks *younger*, with the baby fat starting to build on her cheeks.

Izuku tries not to make eye contact with Aizawa. He watches as Eri and Mouse eat, listens to his mom talk to him about what they'd done today, about when they were planning for later in the week. He lets her talk on and on even though he can't really focus enough to listen. He sits there, steadfastly looking anywhere but his teacher's face until everyone else is done eating and his food has grown cold. He's eaten two, maybe three bites, and his stomach isn't happy about it. The anxiety and guilt is taking up too much room, and Izuku doesn't think he could stomach another bite.

"I-I think I'm going to try and get some sleep before patrol," Izuku says, pushing himself back in his chair and gathering up his dishes before he stands. He can feel everyone's eyes on him, but it's his mom that he looks to for permission. She nods, her eyes a little too wide, a little too concerned, but Izuku takes the nod and runs with it. He walks to the kitchen, pretending that he can't hear Aizawa's footsteps behind him, following him to the sink.

“Midoriya,” Aizawa says, his voice a quiet whisper. Behind the two of them, Izuku can hear conversation start up again between his mom and Mic.

“Sensei,” Izuku says, hoping that the warning in his tone will be enough to dissuade Aizawa from saying anything else. It doesn’t seem to work, though, because Aizawa sighs.

“You did the right thing,” Aizawa says. “It’s going to take Shinsou some time to see that, but you helped him. You did nothing wrong.”

Izuku just nods, swallowing around the lump in his throat as he puts his dishes in the sink. He turns without looking up at his teacher, starting to walk out of the dorm kitchen, but a hand on his shoulder stops him.

“Midoriya, are you--” Aizawa starts, but Izuku cuts him off.

“I’m fine,” Izuku says. “I just need some time, too,” he says, and he shrugs Aizawa’s hand off of him. He walks out of the faculty dorm and into the cool of the night.

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“I’m really pleased with how things are coming along,” Sasaki says as she moves around the room, pulling two teacups down from a cabinet. They’re in a different room than usual, one that looks like a small break room, with an electric kettle and a cabinet that appears to be full of matching ivory and gold teacups and rows and rows of different teas in brightly colored boxes. Sasaki barely has to reach up to grab the cups off of the top shelf with her height, and when she turns to look at Izuku where he’s still sitting at the small wooden table, she has to look down at him.

“Do you have a preference for tea?” she asks, setting the teacups down on the counter and waving a hand up at the assortments of teas in the still-open cabinet. Izuku swallows, folding his hands together in his lap.

“Um, if you--if you have genmaicha?” he asks. Sasaki smiles, giving him a quick nod before she reaches up into the cabinet and takes out two teabags from a green container.

“Good choice,” she purrs, setting the teabags into the cups. The electric kettle in front of her is glowing blue, and Izuku can see bubbles start to rise in the water inside it as Sasaki lifts it. The blue light switches off, and she pours steaming water into each of the cups of tea. She sets the kettle back on its base before picking up the cups of tea, moving back to the table and setting one mug in front of Izuku before moving to sit in her own seat at the other side of the table. Izuku reaches out, wrapping his fingers around the handle of the cup.

“Thank you,” he says, quietly, because Sasaki likes manners. Sasaki waves a hand, a light smile on her lips as she raises her cup of tea and takes a small sip.

“You’re welcome,” she says. “I must admit, there’s not much of a reason for today’s meeting,” she says, giggling slightly. Izuku blinks, but before he has the chance to ask anything, she continues to talk. “I’ve been curious about some things for a while now, so I thought we could play a little game, if you’d be interested in that.” Her eyes narrow slightly, dark lashes almost brushing against the skin under her eyes. “How does a question for a question sound to you?”

Izuku swallows. “Um. Sure?” He doesn’t know how to feel about this, but he figures, worst-case scenario, he can kill himself to undo any information he gives her. Or he could lie--Izuku’s not confident that he’d be able to do that very well, but he thinks that with enough tries he’ll get it right.

“Perfect,” Sasaki says, grinning so wide that the skin under her eyes crinkles slightly. “I’ll start, then.” She leans forward, resting her arms on the wooden table in front of her. “What made you go to UA?” she asks, tipping her head to the side slightly. Izuku blinks.

“Oh, I--I’ve kind of just always wanted to go,” he says, truthfully. “I mean, I was--I was a really big All Might fan as a kid, so...” he trails off. Everyone knows that All Might went to UA, and judging by the way Sasaki nods, a thoughtful look on her face, she gets it.

“You aren’t any more?” she asks, then freezes. “Oops. It’s your turn to ask a question now, isn’t it?” she says, her lips stretching into a grin. It almost looks like she’s trying to hold back a laugh, but that doesn’t make much sense to Izuku.

“R-Right,” Izuku says. He swallows, feels his throat bob. “You’ve said that--that your modifications make it so you can have m-multiple quirks, but you also--you said they weren’t quirks,” he says. Sasaki’s smile shrinks, and her eyes narrow. Izuku hopes he isn’t making a mistake. “What--what are they, exactly?” he asks.

“Hmm,” Sasaki hums, glancing to the side. “It’s kind of a difficult question to answer, simply because I don’t know all of the details myself,” she says, shrugging. “But... they’re like quirks,” she says, raising an arm to feel the top of one of her wings. “They use quirk factor, and they’d be passed on if I have kids,” she says, dropping her hand and meeting Izuku’s gaze. “But they’re not... they’re not in the same place in the genome as quirks normally are.”

“That’s...” Izuku trails off, a little bit confused. Sasaki shakes her head the smallest bit.

“Think of it as someone adding copies of the gene that gives quirks,” Sasaki says, “but they act a little different, because nobody really knows how quirks work.” She smiles. “I’m not sure if that makes any sense to you, to be honest, but I don’t know any better way to explain it.”

“No, I... I think I get it,” Izuku says. “So you--you have pseudo-quirks?” he asks, hoping that it won’t count as another question. Sasaki blinks, then grins.

“That’s a good way to put it,” she says happily. “I think it’s my turn now, though,” she says, her smile widening. “Why don’t you like All Might any more?” she asks. Izuku swallows.

“It’s--it’s not that I don’t like him,” he says, moving his gaze to the table, staring at the dark wood. “He just--I know that he’s human now.” Izuku takes a deep breath. “He--when I met him in person, he told me that--that I couldn’t be a hero.”

“Oh?” Sasaki says, her head tilted to the side slightly and the tiniest crease between her brows, the tiniest frown on her lips. “That doesn’t sound very like him,” she says.

“He, um--he didn’t--he thought I was quirkless,” Izuku explains, chewing at his bottom lip. “So, he was--I think he just didn’t want me to--to put myself in danger, you know?”

Sasaki nods slowly. “I guess. I just... I don’t know, Midoriya,” she says, running a fingertip along the edge of her teacup. “I think, if you’d chosen to be a hero instead of a villain, you’d really be quite good at it,” she says. “It’s a shame what this world does to hero-hopefuls, isn’t it?” she asks, and when Izuku blinks, her lips quirk up slightly into a smile. “You and I, we understand what it’s like to be crushed. We understand why good people decide to become villains,” she says. Her acid-green eyes, narrowed and bright, feel like they’re staring into Izuku’s very soul. Izuku swallows, but his throat is too dry. He picks up his teacup with shaking hands and takes a sip.

“It’s your turn to ask something,” Sasaki says, a faint smile on her lips as she raises her own cup to

her mouth. Izuku swallows.

“Why did--why did you stop being a hero?” Izuku asks. “Why--why did you become a villain?” Sasaki’s grin widens, pushing against the bottoms of her eyes.

“Well,” she says, chuckling. “Heroism killed my beloved twin sister, after all.” She shrugs, like this is old news. “I just wanted someone else to feel the same pain I do.”

Chapter End Notes

content warning: abuse, suicidal thoughts

[discord!](#) [carrd!](#)

pog pog pog hope u enjoyed besties gl if u also have finals coming up

telling

Chapter Summary

last time: izuku does a snitchin', surprisingly does not require stitches after, and learns some sasaki lore.

Chapter Notes

hi sorry this is late school is kicking my ASS but it ends on the 14th so :3c

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Izuku's hands are shaking as he steps off of the elevator and into the lobby. He's not sure if it's what Sasaki had told him, the fact that she'd said *heroism* killed her sister and that she wanted others to *feel her pain*, or if it's the look that was on her face, the distant gleam in her eyes, the way her smile looked almost painful. He isn't sure if he's scared or not—it feels like he is, but at the same time, he just feels kind of distant. Numb. Izuku doesn't think that's a good thing, really, but he'll take it over being definitely anxious.

It's probably because he's feeling so strange and distant and *weird* that he doesn't see Miura until he almost runs into her. Izuku startles when a shadow falls over his vision, jerking back and stopping in his path. His gaze moves upward, catching on Miura's startled face, her brown eyes wide. Izuku's never really noticed before, but there's a thin ring of violet in her eyes, so subtle that he wonders for a moment if he's just imagining it.

"Midoriya?" Miura asks, her brows furrowing slightly as the both of them take a step back. She seems almost confused for a moment before a frown forms on her lips. "You were meeting with the boss," she says, and it's not a question. Izuku blinks, nodding.

"Um, yeah," he says. "I was just--I was going to head home next," he explains, rambling nervously. He's not sure why Miura's face is so dark right now, and it's kind of scaring him. She looks almost like Fury, except not at all--it's an expression Izuku's seen Fury make, but Miura's body language is all different.

"You need to be careful," Miura says, and Izuku can see the muscle in her jaw tense as she grits her teeth for a moment. "You just--you need to be careful, okay?"

Izuku swallows. "I-I will be--I *am*, but what's--what's this about?" he asks, shaking his head slightly like it'll clear away the confusion. "Is something going to happen?" he asks.

Miura stares down at him for a moment. Her eyes look dark, now, and Izuku isn't sure the violet is there at all. She shuts her eyes, squeezing them shut, and she shakes her head before she turns and starts to walk past him.

"I don't know," Miura says, shortly, and it's so quiet Izuku isn't sure he was meant to hear in the first place. He whirls around as she stalks past him, but he doesn't stop her, doesn't say anything.

He watches as she walks out of sight before he moves, and even then, he feels unsettled as he resumes his walk out of the building.

--

Izuku's in the common area of the dorm, washing dishes. It's started to become a regular thing, Shinsou leaving a mess for Izuku to clean up. Izuku knows that, if he were to say something to Aizawa or even if Aizawa noticed on his own, Shinsou would be forced to clean up his own mess. He knows that Shinsou's doing it on purpose, too--the dishes are only left when Izuku's home, never when he's gone for the day. It's the same way with Shinsou leaving cabinets open or dropping Izuku's towels on the floor in the bathroom. Only when Izuku's there at the dorm, not when he's out on patrol.

Izuku doesn't *mind*, necessarily. He doesn't like it, sure, but that's not because he doesn't want to clean up after Shinsou. He thinks, of all things, Izuku can do this for Shinsou, to make up for what he'd done to the other boy. It's more that Izuku would almost rather that Shinsou yelled at him or called him something nasty or cursed him out or hit him or *something*. As it is, Izuku's only seen Shinsou in the shadows, only when he thinks Izuku isn't around, thinks that Izuku isn't looking. For all intents and purposes, it's like Izuku is living in the dorm building alone.

That's why, when Izuku hears the sound of the door being slammed open, he flinches and jumps in surprise, the dishes he's washing clattering to the bottom of the sink. Izuku winces at the noise, glancing down into the sink to double-check that none of the dishes had broken, before he turns and looks at the door. He's expecting to see Aizawa or Present Mic, maybe even Shinsou if the other boy has finally decided to yell at Izuku.

Instead, Izuku sees a spiky, white-blond head of hair and a pair of bright crimson eyes. His eyebrows shoot up into his hairline as Kacchan's eyes meet his, and he sees a lazy smirk cross Kacchan's face as the boy steps into the common area, kicking the door shut behind him. His bag is slung over his shoulder.

"Missed me?" Kacchan says, laughter in his voice. "You look like you've seen a fucking ghost," he says, rolling his eyes as he steps into the common room. Izuku abandons the dishes in the sink, quickly wiping his hands off on the towel hanging beside the fridge and hurrying over to Kacchan.

"You're back so *early*," Izuku says, looking Kacchan over. He almost can't believe that he's *here*, that someone who isn't involved in this stupid Gekkeiju stuff is real and here and talking to him. It feels amazing and strange all at once; it's almost like he'd forgotten that the other students existed.

"Not really," Kacchan says, quirking up an eyebrow. "School starts again in a fucking week," he says, and Izuku blinks.

"A-A week?" he echoes, thinking back on the date. He realizes, suddenly, that he has no idea what day it is, only that it's January at this point and that Sasaki had said that the big jailbreak would be late January, early February.

"Yeah, a week," Kacchan says, raising an eyebrow. "Did you hit your fucking head or something while I was gone?" he asks, his eyes moving up and down Izuku's body like he's looking for something. Izuku feels uncomfortable, suddenly, and he resists the urge to leave the room.

"Um, I-I guess I just lost track of time," Izuku mumbles, watching Kacchan roll his eyes again.

"Yeah, I mean *clearly*," Kacchan says, turning and starting towards the stairs. "C'mon, nerd. Help me put my shit away," he says, and Izuku doesn't hesitate to scramble after him. There's

something so comforting, so familiar about the way Kacchan moves. It's like his confidence is contagious, like Izuku feels better just for being *near* someone who isn't falling apart at the seams. Izuku wonders, briefly, if Kacchan can tell what a mess Izuku is, or if Izuku just looks his normal amount of strange.

"Where's Mindfuck?" Kacchan asks while they're walking up the stairs, and Izuku doesn't flinch but it's a near thing.

"He, um--he's not talking to me," Izuku says, quietly. "I kind of--I kind of messed up, Kacchan." There's a pause before he hears Kacchan huff out a sigh.

"Sounds like you," he says, but there's no heat to the words. The stairs seem to be shorter than normal as they arrive on Kacchan's floor, the other boy leading the way. "So what did you do?"

Izuku swallows. "I, um--it's kind of private," he says, watching as Kacchan unlocks his door. The other boy's hands move smoothly, without shaking or trembling. Izuku doesn't think his hands have *ever* been that steady, not when he was a kid and certainly not now.

"Well either fucking tell me, or don't," Kacchan says, pushing the door to his room open. Izuku can see him wrinkle his nose at the dust in the air, but the room really isn't that bad for him having been gone a month.

"He--his parents, they were--they were hurting him," Izuku says, quiet. "And I--when I found out, I t-told Aizawa-sensei." It's a simple explanation, and it makes everything sound so easy. So straightforward. Izuku wishes he had the words to explain what it was really like, what he'd seen and heard and felt. He wishes he knew how to tell Kacchan why this was such a big deal, but judging by the look Kacchan throws him, Kacchan knows even if Izuku hasn't said it.

"So he's mad because you ratted him out," Kacchan says, and Izuku can't help but wince at his words.

"Y-Yeah," Izuku replies, swallowing around the lump in his throat. "He was--he kept going *home* to them," he explains. "I just--I didn't want--"

"I know," Kacchan says, sighing heavily, and it catches Izuku off guard for a moment. "I don't get why he wouldn't just fucking stay at the dorms," Kacchan says, shaking his head just the slightest bit as he sets his bag down on his bed and unzips it. "Coulda saved himself and you a lot of trouble."

"Did I--" Izuku starts, pausing to take a breath. "Did I do the right thing?" he asks, his voice coming out small, almost a squeak. It's funny, that after everything that's happened, he still looks to Kacchan to tell him what's right, what's good.

"Fucking obviously," Kacchan snorts, looking up at Izuku with narrowed eyes. "Were you supposed to just keep letting them fucking beat his ass?" Kacchan asks, rolling his eyes as he turns back to his bag. "I mean I get it, I'd be pissed too if I were him. But you needed to fucking do it." Kacchan says it firmly, without any room for an argument, without any room for Izuku to think he might be lying to make Izuku feel better. Not that Kacchan would *ever* do that. If Izuku can trust one thing, it's that Kacchan will tell him how he really feels.

"Okay," Izuku says, taking a deep breath and pressing the palms of his hands into the fabric of his pants. "Okay." He feels steadier, now, if only a little bit.

"Are you gonna help me unpack or are you just gonna stand there?" Kacchan asks, turning and

giving Izuku an unimpressed look. Izuku huffs out a light laugh and takes a step towards his friend.

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“So, tell me,” Kacchan says as he plops into the seat across from Izuku at the table. Izuku blinks up at him, his spoonful of cereal paused in midair as he meets Kacchan’s red eyes, confused. *It’s too early for this*, he thinks, and his early-morning haze definitely isn’t helped by the fact that Izuku and Kacchan stayed up until late last night talking and watching a new TV show that Kacchan had insisted Izuku couldn’t miss out on. Izuku’d felt almost *normal* for the past eighteen or so hours, and maybe that’s why Kacchan’s demand doesn’t make any sense to him.

“Tell you...?” Izuku asks, feeling his brows furrow as he sets his spoon back into his bowl of cereal. Kacchan huffs, rolling his eyes.

“What your actual quirk is, dumbass. You said you’d tell me before break is over, so get to it,” Kacchan says. Izuku swallows, suddenly feeling a lot less hungry and a lot more just tired.

“I--break isn’t over yet,” Izuku says, his voice more strained than it had been just a moment before. Kacchan squints at him.

“It’s over in less than a damn week,” he points out. “You’re running out of time,” he says, and it hits a nerve that Izuku didn’t expect it to. Izuku isn’t sure why he feels so empty and tired and upset all of a sudden, but he stands up, picking up his half eaten bowl of cereal. The ceramic is cold from the milk as he turns and walks into the kitchen, depositing his bowl in the sink.

“Deku, don’t fucking ignore me,” Kacchan warns, but Izuku just sighs.

“I’ll tell you before break ends,” Izuku says. “Just--I’m going to be late for a meeting,” he says. He expects Kacchan to argue with him, expects to hear a huff or a shout, but instead, there’s no reply. Izuku turns around, wary, only to see Kacchan watching him with a thoughtful gaze. Izuku feels strangely exposed with the way Kacchan’s narrowed crimson eyes stick to whatever expression Izuku is wearing, so he turns and hurries over to the door, where his bag is already sitting, ready for him.

“Be safe,” Kacchan says, barely more than a grunt. Izuku nods in reply, but he can’t bring himself to answer. As he slides on his shoes, he can’t help but think about what Kacchan had said. *You’re running out of time*, he thinks to himself. *You’re running out of time*.

--

Izuku doesn’t think that it’s healthy that he’s started losing track of time the way he has been, but there’s also not much that he can really do about it. For all of the promises the adults made about therapy and getting him help and taking care of him, it all seems to have fallen apart over break. More and more, it seems to be just Izuku. Izuku, meeting with Sasaki almost every day only for her to ask strange questions and tell him nothing at all. Izuku, in the dorm room with his neighbor who ignores him. Izuku, on the streets at night, the winter wind in his hair and stinging the skin on his cheeks.

Izuku doesn’t blame them, really. He doesn’t think that this break has been easy on anyone, not on Shinsou or Aizawa for sure, but it’s kind of disappointing that he feels so alone. It’s not that they haven’t been trying--Izuku still has those dinners every night, still gets to see Mouse and Eri and his mom. He knows that Aizawa cares, knows that Aizawa would do anything to help Izuku, but he also knows that things aren’t ever as easy as they sound in your head.

Regardless, Izuku thinks that he should be a little more worried about the fact that time seems to be slipping through his fingers like loose sand. He hadn't even realized how long they'd been on break until Kacchan came back and started talking about how close school was to starting. He never knows what day of the week it is anymore, especially not now that he goes to the Gekkeiju tower multiple times a week. He doesn't think he'd even know the time of day if it didn't get dark at night.

As Izuku pushes open the door to the lobby, giving Yamamoto a quick nod as he starts straight for the elevators, he notes that he doesn't even really remember the walk over here. He remembers leaving the dorm, remembering staring at his reflection in a puddle on patrol, but he doesn't remember when he'd turned towards the tower or even when he'd been told that they were having a meeting today. Izuku doesn't even seem to notice himself pressing the button to call the elevator, although he knows that he's done it because the button is glowing.

Izuku notes, absently, that he isn't really even afraid of elevators anymore. He thinks it's the fact that he's been on them so many times the past month or so, going to visit Sasaki like he's asked to do so very often. He's been on the elevator so much without getting hurt that Izuku's stopped associating the elevators with him in the first place.

I haven't even seen Fury lately, Izuku realizes as he steps onto the elevator, letting the doors slide shut in front of him as he presses the button for the top floor. He's sure that Fury's around, since he knows that Haruta sees the man sometimes, but Izuku hasn't seen him at all, really. He hasn't even seen much of Manami, and he's supposed to be reporting to her. It's strange, really, the way that he never seems to actually report to the person who's supposed to be in charge of him.

The elevator doors open to the top floor, and Izuku steps off with a sigh. He's not scared, really, just tired. Izuku's been feeling the kind of bone-deep exhaustion that only seems to come with being on edge constantly, and he's starting to get kind of tired of it. He wonders if any of his classmates know what this is like, if this is how Todoroki feels after spending time at home with his dad. He wonders if this is how it was for Shinsou, even before he worked with the Gekkeiju. He wonders how Haruta's survived like this for so long, if this is how Izuku feels in less than a year.

Izuku finds himself knocking on Sasaki's door without registering himself crossing the hallway and walking up to the door in the first place. It's an uncomfortable sensation, like he's losing himself, and he gives himself a little shake to try and drive the uneasiness away. *I should really try to sleep more*, he thinks as he hears Sasaki's voice.

"Come in, Midoriya!" she calls, and Izuku sets his hand on the doorknob, turning it and opening the door. He thinks it's nice that Sasaki's kept calling him by his last name. Fury had just started calling him that without Izuku's permission, and it had always felt wrong, like Fury was trying to say that Izuku and him were *close*. Izuku's been thinking a lot about Fury lately, and he's not really sure why.

Izuku steps into the room, giving Sasaki a quick nod before he moves to sit on the same ottoman that he always does. It's warmer in the room than usual, and when Izuku strains to hear, he can make out the soft sound of the heater running. Sasaki is sitting on the couch in front of him, wearing a black tank top and a pair of cream-colored leggings. It's probably the most casual Izuku's seen her. There's a smile stretched across her face, like usual, and Izuku draws in a breath to prepare himself for whatever she's about to say or do.

"Midoriya," she starts. "I would make small talk, but I think you'd appreciate it if we jumped right into things today." Sasaki leans forward, folding her hands in her lap. "I know you've been very,

very eager to know when our little adventure is going to take place, and I'm happy to say that I can finally tell you."

Izuku swears he feels a chill run up his spine. He swallows, his eyes going wide as he leans forward slightly.

"You know--you know when we're going to--to do the jailbreak?" he asks, and he can hear the excitement in his own voice. It sounds like he was a kid who just got told he could go to the candy store. Izuku hopes that it's helping to convince Sasaki that he's on her side, rather than making him look suspicious.

"I do," Sasaki replies, her grin crinkling her eyes. "It'll be two weeks from today. January 28th." Her voice is even, calm. It takes Izuku a moment to process what she'd even said, and even then, the first reaction he has is to breathe out, low and slow.

"Two weeks," Izuku says, and Sasaki nods, her hair bobbing around her head.

"Two weeks," she repeats, amusement in her voice.

--

"Midoriya," Aizawa says as Izuku turns to walk out of the meeting room. "Hang back a moment. Nezu and I need to talk with you," he says, and when Izuku pauses and looks back at him, neither Aizawa nor Nezu have moved from their seats around the conference table. The rest of the group is fast dissolving, and if Izuku stays near the door, he knows that he's going to block the flow of traffic, so he moves away from the door and to the side. For a moment, there's a tiny sliver of fear that worms its way through his body, but then he reminds himself that it's just Aizawa and Nezu, that Izuku doesn't have to be careful around them. It's not like with Sasaki, who might *act* nice but has killed him time and time again.

Izuku sinks into the chair closest to him, one that's facing Aizawa and Nezu. They both seem to be waiting for everyone else to leave the room, and Izuku passes the few moments of time by staring down at the wooden table beneath his arms. The surface is that kind of laminated wood that Izuku's never sure is real. He thinks it *could* be, but at the same time, he wouldn't be shocked if it was just an *image* of wood over particle board or something like that. Either way, the surface that he can actually feel is cool and plasticky.

"Midoriya," Aizawa says, his voice gentle. Izuku's head jerks up, and he meets Aizawa's gaze for just a moment. He wonders, briefly, if he's in trouble, but Izuku doesn't think he could have possibly managed to do anything to *get* himself in trouble, not with how busy he's been with the Gekkeiju stuff and with patrolling and all.

"What's--what's this about?" Izuku asks, trying to soothe his nerves by running his fingertips along the textured plastic surface of the table.

"You're not in trouble, if that's what you're worried about," Aizawa says, and Izuku feels a little embarrassed at being read so easily. "We wanted to discuss the upcoming semester with you."

"It's only in a few days, after all," Nezu chimes in, a friendly smile on his face. "Frankly, we should have had this meeting sooner." He glances to Aizawa, nodding slightly.

"We think that it'd be best if we treated your involvement with the Gekkeiju and your identity as Ace as a work-study," Aizawa says, and Izuku blinks in surprise. "It's not a perfect solution, but this way, there'll be a little bit less on your plate."

“You--you can do that?” Izuku asks, and he doesn’t miss the way that Nezu stifles a giggle. “I didn’t--I thought that I’d just have to do it like last semester,” he explains, and Aizawa shakes his head quickly.

“You’ll be allowed to miss up to half of classes, and you’ll have extra time on assignments,” Aizawa says. “Officially, you’re doing a work study with the Commission, which is a little bit unorthodox, but it’s happened before.” He sighs. “Other than classes going on, not much is going to change. You should still bring your wire to all missions and meetings, and you should expect more meetings with the entire team.”

Izuku nods. “R-Right,” he says, swallowing. Aizawa’s dark eyes move over him quickly, and the man’s brows furrow slightly.

“Are you doing alright?” Aizawa asks, and Izuku knows what he’s seeing. Aizawa sees the dark circles under Izuku’s eyes. He sees the way that Izuku is shaking slightly, even now when he’s relatively calm.

“I-I’m okay,” Izuku says, and he knows that’s not good enough, so he adds, “A-As well as can be expected, anyway.”

Aizawa stares at him for another long moment before giving a short nod. “Let me know if there’s anything you need from me,” he says, and Izuku nods in return. He’s not sure what Aizawa could do, really. Izuku just needs to hold on until the 28th, and then everything will be okay. It’ll be *great*, even.

“Midoriya,” Nezu says, and Izuku turns to look at him. “I also wanted to thank you,” he says. Izuku frowns, confused, but Nezu continues. “You really helped Shinsou out when you let Aizawa know what was going on. I know you haven’t heard much about what came of that, since it’s private information, but I wanted you to know that you were very brave. Heroics isn’t just saving people from a burning building or from the clutches of a villain,” Nezu continues, his black eyes boring a hole into Izuku. “Sometimes, it’s getting them somewhere safe even when they don’t want to leave.”

Izuku stares back at Nezu. His throat is suddenly very tight, his head suddenly swimming. He thinks that, if he were to speak, that he might burst out into tears right then and there, so he keeps his mouth shut, but from the looks that Aizawa and Nezu give each other, it’s obvious enough even without him talking.

“You are a hero, Midoriya,” Nezu says, his voice almost gentle. “That doesn’t change just because you’ve been undercover.” He and Aizawa are both watching Izuku, their gazes searching, and Izuku isn’t sure he’ll be able to stand it any longer. He nods jerkily.

“Is that--is that everything?” he asks, and he definitely *sounds* like he’s about to cry. Aizawa nods, and Izuku can’t help but breathe a sigh of relief. He stands up and walks out of the room, swiping away at the tears that form at the edges of his eyes.

Nezu thinks I’m a hero, he tells himself, a watery smile spreading across his face. *I’m still a hero*.

--

Izuku goes to Kacchan’s room that same night. It’s a Thursday night, only a few days before the other students will start coming back, so he figures it’s just about his last chance. That, and knowing the date of when everything with the Gekkeiju will end makes him feel braver. He thinks that, just maybe, he can get through this conversation and get through the jailbreak and then all he

has to do is heal from everything in the past.

It's a little chilly in the hallway where Izuku's standing, his hand raised in a fist like he's about to knock on the door. He's been like this for a while, and it's really kind of pathetic--he hasn't moved, not in a few long minutes. *It's just Kacchan*, Izuku tells himself, but he knows that the other boy isn't why he's nervous. He's scared because he's going to help to tell Kacchan about his quirk now. He's scared because he's going to have to *tell* the truth.

Izuku reaches forward and knocks on the surface of the door. It's a quiet sound, and Izuku thinks for a moment that there's no way that Kacchan could have possibly heard. That's until he hears a groan from inside the room.

"Deku?" Kacchan calls, his voice slightly muffled by the door. Izuku nods, then remembers that Kacchan can't actually see him.

"Y-Yeah, it's me," Izuku says, and his voice is shaking enough that he's pretty sure it's noticeable even through the door.

"One sec," Kacchan mumbles, and a few seconds later, Izuku hears the lock turning over. The door swings open, revealing Kacchan in a t-shirt and sweats. There's a smear of ink on his hand when he gestures at Izuku to come in, and Izuku can see his notes open on his desk.

"You're--you're already studying?" Izuku asks, surprised. It's not like they have anything to study over the winter break.

"Shut up, nerd," Kacchan says, and Izuku has to resist the urge to point out that Kacchan is the one studying. "I figure you're here to finally fucking spill, so sit your ass down. Chair or bed, I don't care," he says, gesturing to the room. It's neat, tidy except for the papers strewn across the desk. Izuku chooses to sit on the bed, the soft grey bedspread compressing under his weight as he plops down onto it.

Kacchan settles into the chair backwards, turned so that he can face Izuku. His arms are folded along the top of the chair, and his eyes are serious as he stares at Izuku. Izuku swallows heavily, knitting his fingers together and resting them in his lap.

"S-So," Izuku starts. He doesn't continue, though, mostly because he has no idea how to say this. *I have to die to use my quirk* is too straightforward, he thinks. Too blunt. He doesn't know if there's a way to soften this, though, and he's also not sure if it would be fair to try to in the first place.

"So," Kacchan echoes, his voice dry and serious. Izuku takes a slow breath, shuts his eyes for just a moment, and tells himself that if this goes bad, if this goes *really* bad, then he's still got one final option. He doesn't like to think that he'd turn back time for this, but he has to tell himself he can, just to give himself the courage.

"I--my quirk has an activation requirement," Izuku says, staring down at his lap. "I don't--I don't know the *exact* details if I'm being honest, but--but it all seems to be linked to the same thing." He swallows. "I--I have to die, Kacchan."

"What?" Kacchan asks, and when Izuku's looking up at him, he looks confused more than anything else. "Wait, you--no, you're not--" Kacchan shakes his head, reeling back slightly. His brows pull together over his eyes, and Izuku kind of wants to run.

"It's--it's not as bad as it sounds," Izuku explains, weakly. "Um. When I die, it--it turns back time a little bit. So--so I don't really die," he says. He thinks his hands are shaking, but his vision's

getting a little blurry with tears so it's hard to tell. He hears Kacchan take in a ragged breath, and then there's a long moment of silence. Izuku looks up, and Kacchan is pinching the bridge of his nose, his face all screwed up like he'd bitten into something sour. He stays like that for a few moments, eyes closed and lips turned down in a frown, before he sighs.

"How many times?" Kacchan asks, his voice dangerously low. Izuku blinks.

"W-What do you--" Izuku starts, but Kacchan cuts him off.

"How many times," Kacchan says, and Izuku knows what's coming next because Kacchan is *smart* and Izuku knows he wouldn't miss this, "did you kill yourself?" Kacchan finishes, and Izuku knows he's staring at him even without moving his own gaze up from his lap. Izuku cliches his fingers together tightly and focuses on the pain.

"Why do you--why do you say t-that?" Izuku says, because asking that technically isn't a lie. He doesn't expect it to work though, not really.

"Because you used your quirk at the damn *sports festival*," Kacchan spits. "And we both know damn well that you've been told to off yourself before." He pauses. "Deku, was that--was that what you did the first time?" he asks, and Izuku can *hear* the horror in his voice, can hear the dawning realization. "I--Deku, I told you to kill yourself. You said that--that you figured it out in middle school, right?" Kacchan says, and he's standing up from the chair quickly enough to make Izuku flinch. "Did you kill yourself because of--"

"No!" Izuku shouts, cutting Kacchan off. "I didn't--not because of you, and the first time, it--" Izuku shakes his head. "It wasn't suicide the first time, Kacchan, I--I got killed by a villain," he explains, squeezing his eyes shut. He ignores the burning tears that threaten to spill out of his eyes when he does so.

"What?" Kacchan asks. "Why were you near a fucking villain?" he asks, and then: "What fucking villain? I'll kill them right fucking now," he spits. Izuku kind of wants to laugh, but he doesn't.

"The sludge villain," Izuku says, and he opens his eyes once again to stare at the blurry image of his lap in front of him. "It was--it was the sludge villain."

"But--" Kacchan starts, before he cuts himself off. "You know--you fucking knew how to fight him," Kacchan says, and there's astonishment in his voice. "You'd done that before. That's how you knew." It's not a question, but Izuku nods anyway.

"I-I only--I wouldn't have been able to save you without my quirk," Izuku says. "I would have--I would have just died before you." He breathes out, slow. It's odd, because Izuku had expected to feel worse, had expected to feel like he was drowning or like he'd messed everything up and made everything weird and bad and messy, but instead it feels like a weight's been lifted off his shoulders. He feels like he can breathe.

"When was the first time?" Kacchan asks, and Izuku looks up at him, confused.

"I just told--" Izuku starts, but Kacchan interrupts him.

"When was the first time you *killed yourself*?" Kacchan says, and there's anger in his voice now, his red eyes blazing. Izuku swallows.

"The--the same day," Izuku says meekly. "After the slime villain, I--I wasn't sure and I just h-had to test it, and I was, um, alone on top of a building, so..." He trails off. Kacchan's staring at him, eyes wide.

“You killed yourself to *test* it?” Kacchan asks, and then his brows furrow. “You’re not that fucking stupid, Deku,” he says, stepping forward. “Tell me you’re not that fucking stupid,” he says as Izuku instinctively leans back.

“I--Kacchan, I’ve been able to do *so much* because of it,” Izuku explains, raising his hands palm up in front of him. “I wouldn’t--I wouldn’t have even b-been able to get into UA without it.” He watches something dark cross over Kacchan’s expression.

“You fucking *should* have been able to,” Kacchan spits. “You deserve it more than *any* of these other motherfuckers,” he says, slamming a fist down against the dresser beside his bed. Izuku flinches, hard, and he can see the guilt that flashes in Kacchan’s eyes.

“Kacchan, I--” Izuku starts, but he stops when Kacchan shakes his head.

“How many times, Izuku?” he asks, and Izuku knows there’s weight to the fact that Kacchan’s using his real name. He knows how much that means.

“I don’t know,” Izuku says, quietly. “I have no idea. It’s--it’s too many to count.”

The look of horror that fills Kacchan’s face is enough to make Izuku wish he’d never said anything at all.

Chapter End Notes

content warning: discussion of suicide, dissociation

[discord!](#) [carrd!](#)

pog through the pain my gamers. pog through the pain.

also I'm probably gonna start a youtube channel this summer bc I'm bored and stinky

suicide watch

Chapter Summary

last time: kacchan comes back to the dorm, izuku gets Unnerved, and izuku snitches ON HIMSELF!!

Chapter Notes

sorry for the short one gamers i just didn't think the next scene would fit right if I added it onto this chappie

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“I’m putting you on fucking nerd suicide watch,” Kacchan says, and Izuku can’t do anything except for blink as he processes it. He frowns, looking at Kacchan’s face for some hint that he might be joking, but there’s nothing there, not with the serious set to his eyes and the determined frown on his lips.

“You--you can’t do that,” Izuku says. “I’m not *actually* suicidal,” he says, shaking his head. Kacchan’s eyes narrow.

“What the fuck do you mean I can’t?” Kacchan says. “I’m not going to go and let you fucking *kill yourself*,” he says, arching an eyebrow. “And how the hell would that be anything *other* than suicide, Deku?”

“I don’t--I don’t actually die,” Izuku points out, wrapping his arms over his chest. “It’s not--you can’t just watch me all the time Kacchan, I’m *busy*.” He doesn’t think he has to tell Kacchan about the stuff with the villains. He knows that Kacchan knows how important this is, how much Izuku’s putting himself at risk.

“I don’t have to watch you all the time,” Kacchan says after a moment. He folds his arms over his chest, mirroring Izuku. “I just need to watch you when you’ve got free time. If you die when you’re on a mission or whatever, it’s not like you’re killing yourself for some shit like the sports festival or to test your quirk or something.” Kacchan pauses, his eyes narrowing. “It shouldn’t be a problem, unless you’re killing yourself for kicks or some shit.” Izuku swallows. He hears the unspoken question, but he pretends not to notice it.

“My schedule--it’s weird, Kacchan,” Izuku says, pressing his lips together. “You can’t--you can’t come on patrol, and I--I go out in the middle of the night, early in the morning.” Izuku swallows. “You should--you don’t have to do anything about this. It’s not something--it’s not a problem, really.” Izuku can see Kacchan’s frown deepening into a scowl, can see his brows furrowing more and more as he speaks. Izuku would almost rather that Kacchan blew up on him literally.

“I’ll sleep in your room, then,” Kacchan says, like that’s something that he can just decide for himself without consulting Izuku. “And whatever the fuck you use to do it, we’ll throw it away. Or you can sleep in my room, I don’t fucking care,” he adds, looking thoughtful. “What is it you use,

anyway? We have to get rid of all that crap, since--"

"I can't just get rid of all of the weapons I own," Izuku protests, and he realizes immediately that it's the wrong thing to say as Kacchan's gaze sharpens on him. "Not that--not that I use all of them!" Izuku protests, raising his hands in front of his face placatingly. "Just--I mean, technically they could--they could all do that, you know?"

Kacchan stares at him for a long moment before he sighs, his red eyes sliding shut for a moment. When he opens them, there's a renewed determination in his eyes, and Izuku knows that it's bad news for him even before Kacchan speaks.

"I should just tell fucking Aizawa," Kacchan says, his brows lowering on his face. "I just told your dumb ass that you did the right thing, telling on fucking Mindfuck. I should tell him." It's almost like Kacchan is talking to himself now, not Izuku.

"You can't," Izuku says, and it's almost a whisper. "No, Kacchan--I'll sleep in your room or whatever, but you can't--you can't tell him," Izuku says, his words spilling out in a panicked rush. "There's--there's so much going on, you can't--it would mess everything up--Aizawa-sensei wouldn't let me do the--the mission, and I would--" Izuku has to pause to steady himself, taking a deep breath. "You can't, Kacchan. It would--it would be bad, and not just for me."

Kacchan's eyes narrow. "How the fuck would it be bad?" he asks. "All you'd lose is the freedom to hurt yourself, that's a good thing." He sounds confused and angry, and Izuku realizes that Kacchan really doesn't know anything, doesn't understand.

"We're--we're taking down the Gekkeiju, the villains," he says, his voice dull. "On the 28th. And if--if Aizawa knows about my quirk, if he knows that--that I've died while fighting them--he wouldn't let me," Izuku says, shutting his eyes for just a moment. "Everything I've--everything we've gone through, Shinsou and Haruta and I, it would be for nothing. If I pulled out, S--the boss, she would know. She would know something was--was wrong," he explains, his eyes still closed. "I can't--I can't ruin that, Kacchan."

"So you'll stop?" Kacchan asks, and when Izuku opens his eyes he can tell that Kacchan doesn't think Izuku will be willing to. "If that shit would get ruined by you killing yourself, then you'll stop doing it?" Izuku swallows.

"I will," Izuku says, and he thinks he means it. "If that's what--if that's what it takes to bring them down, then I--then I would," he says. He clenches his hands into fists, feels his nails biting into his skin. "I'd do a lot more than that to--to save lives."

"Start with your own," Kacchan says, his voice thick. "I'll keep your fucking secret for now, but only if--only if you--"

"Only if I stop," Izuku finishes for him. Izuku swallows, presses his hands into the fabric of his pants. "Okay," he says, after a long moment.

He sleeps in Kacchan's room that night, on an air mattress that Kacchan swears he didn't buy just so that he could have people sleep over. He sleeps in Kacchan's room that night, and when Kacchan asks for his keys, he hands them over and doesn't say anything when Kacchan disappears for about ten minutes and comes back with red eyes and tear-stained cheeks. He pretends he doesn't notice that his rope and his pills and his razors are gone when he goes to his room to get a change of clothes, Kacchan hovering over his shoulder.

--

Izuku feels like a weight's been lifted off of his shoulders when he finally gets out to patrol. He knows that Kacchan is just trying to look after him, that he thinks that he's helping, but Izuku feels like he's drowning. He doesn't like that Kacchan's looking at him all the time, doesn't like that he can't go anywhere in the dorms without a tail. He feels helpless, like a little kid in trouble, and it's almost demeaning. Izuku's faced death and torture; he can handle going to the kitchen to getting a drink of water without killing himself on the way there.

So, when he finally leaves to patrol the city, it's a little earlier than he'd planned to. The sun is setting over the western edge of the city, painting the horizon in orange and bright magenta hues. The skyline looks like black charcoal buildings framed against the colorful sky and the pastel pale clouds, and even though staring in the direction of the fat golden sun where it's almost behind the buildings hurts Izuku's eyes, he does it anyway just to watch the sky. It's beautiful in a way that almost makes Izuku forget the fact that he's less than two weeks from helping to capture villains that have killed hundreds.

Izuku's breath comes out in little puffs of white fog, and he can only feel it growing colder the longer he spends on the streets. There's that special kind of chill in the shade, and the shadows are only growing as the sun dips lower and lower on the horizon. Izuku knows he should have brought a thicker coat--even though there's no snow coming, there's a cold front blowing through--but he doesn't want to go back now and deal with Kacchan's hovering. It's worth shivering a little bit if it means that Izuku gets to move around like he's his own person, like he's a *hero* and not a suicidal kid.

Izuku gets why Kacchan's worrying, though. He gets why Kacchan doesn't want him to kill himself, but that doesn't mean he *agrees*. Izuku doesn't think that killing himself counts as suicide, at the very least. It can't count--it's not permanent, so there really aren't any consequences. Izuku thinks it's the same as when he cuts himself, except killing himself doesn't leave marks or scars and he isn't as likely to get caught.

Izuku wouldn't want Kacchan killing himself or hurting himself either, though, so he gets where his friend is coming from. He's just glad that he was able to talk Kacchan out of telling Aizawa. Izuku doesn't know for certain how Aizawa would react, but he's pretty sure that he wouldn't want Izuku to keep working with the Gekkeiju knowing that he's *actually died* before. Izuku can't let anything get in the way of the 28th, not when it's so close that he feels like he can almost reach out and grab it.

Izuku's startled out of his thoughts by the sound of a soft, gasping breath. He freezes in place, his hands going to the knives at his belt as he strains his ears to hear. It takes a moment for him to make it out over the sounds of the birds chittering along the rooftops, over the wind and the sounds of cars, but the sound is unmistakable once he listens for it--someone is crying.

Izuku relaxes, but only slightly--he doesn't hear another person, so it's unlikely that he's going to have to fight to resolve whatever this is, but he doesn't want to be caught off guard. He moves carefully in the direction of the sound, towards an alleyway not far ahead. It's not a shady one, either--there's a lamp hanging on the wall of one of the bordering buildings, and this is generally a nicer area. Izuku only really patrols through here because it's between two of the rougher areas that he likes to keep an eye on.

"Hello?" Izuku calls, keeping his voice soft and kind. He's learned that, when he approaches civilians, he has to make noise. If they can't hear him coming or if they think he's a villain, then they get *more* afraid when they see him in his costume and not less, like he wants.

Izuku doesn't hear a verbal response, more of a wet snuffle, but it's enough to lead him to the

source. Up against the wall, her back pressed into the dirty concrete, is a woman in her twenties with shoulder length wavy black hair and tanned skin. She's crying, and it's clear that she has been for a while--her face is streaked red where Izuku can see it around the hand clamped over her mouth. Her brown eyes are open wide in shock or maybe fear, and she's shaking. *Probably not just from the cold*, Izuku notes, but she's definitely not wearing enough to be out at night in this weather.

"I'm--I'm so sorry, did I--" the woman starts, her voice thick with tears. "I'm--I'm being so loud, I'm s-sorry," she says, her gaze dropping to the ground and her shoulders hunching forward. Izuku frowns, taking a step towards her with both of his hands up.

"You're not bothering me," Izuku says, keeping his tone level and calm. "You don't need to be sorry; I'm just worried." She looks up at him, taking in the mask and costume.

"I don't--I don't need a hero," she says, her voice soft. "I'm not h-hurt, I'm not in danger, I'm just--I'm just upset," she says, shaking her head and swiping at her eyes with the back of one hand. "It's not--I'm not worth your time, really," she says, and Izuku feels a swell of something in his chest.

"You're worth my time," Izuku says, because he knows that's what *he* would want to hear in her place. "Can you tell me what's wrong? Maybe I can--maybe I can help," he offers. He's kind of working blindly here, to be honest. They haven't had much formal training in this kind of thing, and he's never been all that good at comforting people. He's only really patrolled at night before the break, after all.

"I-I don't mean to be rude, but--but I don't think you can," she says, sniffing. "I-I just--I got fired from my job." She sounds miserable, her voice heavy and wet. "I sh-sh-should have known," she says, her voice shaking as she sobs.

"Do you want to--to talk about it?" Izuku asks. "I can listen, or--or I could walk you home?" He's not sure if that would be weird, but he'd be kind of worried leaving her here. She meets his eyes, her eyes still watery.

"I--you could walk me to the train station," she says, raising one hand to her mouth and chewing on the edge of her thumbnail. "I wouldn't--I wouldn't want you to go out of your way, though." She sniffs, and Izuku wishes he had a tissue to offer her.

"I can do that," Izuku says. "It isn't a problem, really." He has to head in that general direction anyway--the train station usually has some crime around it, at least during the prime times to ride the train. Someone's always waiting to steal from those who aren't suspecting it.

"I-If you're sure," the woman says. Her voice is a little less wet than before, but she still looks like she could start crying again at any moment.

"I am," Izuku says, and he gives her a smile he doesn't think she can actually see through the mask and the goggles. "Is--is the closest one okay?" he asks, just in case. She nods, and Izuku takes a step back even though she has more than enough room to push herself up off of the wall and walk over to the end of the alley, where Izuku stands.

"I shouldn't have been surprised," she says with a sigh. "I mean, I *knew* they had to--to let go of some people, y'know?"

"It still sucks that it had to be you," Izuku says, and it seems to be the right thing to say because she doesn't start crying again, instead nodding.

"I just--I wish I'd had more warning," she says softly. "It's not that I'm going to--to starve or something but--but I'd liked to have applied to some other jobs already." She sighs, reaching up and biting at her nails again.

"I'm sorry," Izuku replies, because he doesn't know what to say to make her feel better. He's not sure there's anything he could say that *would* make her feel completely better, and he hates that. He knows it's not how it works, but he wishes that he could fix things like that. He's a *hero*-- he should be able to make anyone feel better, any time.

She sighs. "It's okay, really. I just--I don't know, I'm being stupid about it." Izuku glances over, sees her fold her arms over her chest.

"It's not stupid to be upset," he says, quietly. She doesn't say anything, just shrugs, but Izuku can tell from the fact that she isn't crying and that she doesn't look like she's about to break apart that she's feeling better, if only a little. When Izuku drops her off at the train station, he realizes that he'd thought of himself as a hero--a *real* hero--that whole time.

--

When Izuku gets back to the dorms, it's so late that he isn't expecting anyone else to be up. Shinsou, maybe, but it's not like Shinsou is *talking* to him, so that doesn't really make much of a difference. Izuku opens the door quietly, because he doesn't really want to wake anyone up, and he's so absorbed in moving quietly that it almost makes him jump when he sees Kacchan messing around in the kitchen. He's wearing an apron, a white dishrag thrown over one shoulder, and it looks like he'd finished cooking or baking a while ago. The kitchen is spotless, but it smells like spun sugar and fried dough in the room. Kacchan is wiping down one of the counters, a look of concentration on his face.

"Kacchan?" Izuku calls, his voice soft. Kacchan startles before turning to look at Izuku. "What are you doing up so late?" Izuku asks. He knows that Kacchan usually likes to go to bed early, much earlier than Izuku ever has. It's well past three in the morning right now, and Izuku doesn't think he's *ever* seen Kacchan stay up so late willingly.

"Wanted to be up when you got back," Kacchan grunts. It's clear that he's exhausted from the way his eyes are puffy and his voice is hoarse, and Izuku feels himself frown.

"You didn't need to do that," Izuku says, kicking his shoes off and walking towards the kitchen. "I was just--I was just going to shower and go to bed," he says, stopping in front of Kacchan. Kacchan looks him over, clearly examining him for any signs of injury or something. Izuku's still wearing his Ace costume, minus the mask and goggles. The goggles are hung around his neck, and the mask is carefully folded up in one of his pockets--he doesn't like to wear either of them on campus, if he can help it.

Izuku realizes in a few moments why, exactly, Kacchan was staying up for him. Izuku scowls as he realizes it, taking a step back from Kacchan and glaring at him. It's a move he wouldn't do with anybody *but* Kacchan or maybe Neito, but Kacchan knows him well enough that Izuku can't bring himself not to.

"You--you thought I was going to kill myself," Izuku accuses. He can tell from the way Kacchan scowls and his eyes narrow that Izuku's right.

"I thought you might fucking hurt yourself, yeah," Kacchan says, turning back to the kitchen counter and the sponge he'd left resting on it. "It's not like it's unprecedented." He starts to scrub at the counter, even though there's clearly nothing left to clean off of it.

“I’m not--I’m not *helpless* , Kacchan,” Izuku says, frustration leaking through to his voice. “I don’t just--I don’t just kill myself all the time for the fun of it, and if I--if I was *going* to, which I *wasn’t* , I wouldn’t do it *here* ,” he says, breathing out heavily through his nose. Kacchan huffs out a breath, his eyes sliding over to Izuku.

“So you’d fucking do it, just not where you’d get caught?” Kacchan asks. Izuku resists the urge to groan.

“No, Kacchan, I mean that I’m *not about to do it* ,” he says, reaching up a hand and dragging it down his face. “Can I just--can I get some *space* ? Please?”

“You’ve been fucking--you’ve been *killing yourself* ,” Kacchan says, shaking his head just the tiniest bit. “I can’t--I can’t just leave you alone, what if you fucking--”

“I’m not going to,” Izuku says, cutting Kacchan off. It sounds like he’s pleading, like he’s begging, and Izuku supposes that maybe he is. “I can’t--I can’t handle being watched all the time, not like this,” he says, reaching a hand up and dragging it through his hair, mussing up his curls and getting the black tint on his hands. He doesn’t care, though, not as he watches Kacchan’s shoulders sag as the man sighs.

“Fine,” he says, turning back to the counter and staring down at it. “But you can’t--you can’t kill yourself because I’m not there,” he says, his voice quieter than Izuku’s ever heard it. Izuku swallows, feeling his brows furrow.

“It wouldn’t be your fault if I--if I did,” Izuku says. It wasn’t--when I did, it was never your fault Kacchan.” Izuku takes a deep breath. “You--you know that, right?”

Kacchan’s silence is more of an answer than words ever would have been.

--

“Now that we’re all here,” Sasaki says, clapping her hands together where she sits at the head of the polished-wood conference table. “Why don’t we get started?” There’s a smile on her lips, just like always, and it’s mirrored by Fury who sits to her left. Manami is to her right, with Miura on her other side. Manami seems to be normal, for her anyway, with a grin on her face and hearts in her eyes, but Miura looks tired, like she hasn’t slept in weeks. There are dark smears underneath her eyes, and she’s staring down at the table with dull eyes. Izuku feels uneasy, especially given that Shinsou is sitting to his right, looking like he’d rather be sitting anywhere but next to Izuku. There are only six seats at the table, though, like Sasaki had meant for them to have to sit by each other.

“I wanted to go over the basics of the plan with all of you,” Sasaki says, folding her hands together and leaning forward over the table. “I know I’ve been a little secretive on this, which must have been very frustrating for all of you.” Her eyes dart to Fury as she says that. “But I promise, I’ve been working hard to get all of the pieces in their places for this.” Her lips quirk up into a wider smile.

“Where’s--” Izuku starts, swallowing and trying to ignore his anxiety when the entire table looks at him. “Sh-shouldn’t Haruta be here?” he asks, his voice too soft and high-pitched. Fury snorts.

“No, he shouldn’t be,” Fury answers, and that seems to be it. Izuku can’t see his eyes through the dark sunglasses he’s wearing, not in this lighting, and he’s grateful for it. It’s been so long since he’s had to face Fury, and he’s not sure that he can handle it again right now, not sure if he’d take well to a flash of gold or milky white.

“Kojima is dealing with another matter,” Sasaki says, her smile pleasant and warm. Izuku feels, inexplicably, like a bug pinned to a mat as she looks at him, her eyes narrowing slightly. “It’s kind of you to worry about him, Midoriya,” Sasaki says, her voice soft. Izuku swallows.

“The 28th,” Miura says, breaking Sasaki’s focus on Izuku, “right?”

Sasaki looks at Miura like she’s thinking, like she’s trying to solve a puzzle, before she nods. “Right. We’ll be starting at four in the evening, since this kind of operation works best at night,” she says, moving her gaze over the entire table. “I want all of you to be in the lobby at four, wearing your costumes. From there, we’ll go to the Tokyo location, where I’ll explain more of the details.”

Miura makes a surprised noise. “The Tokyo location? Why would we--”

“Well,” Sasaki laughs, cutting Miura off. “The jail is in Tokyo, isn’t it?” She seems amused, like Miura’s just told a funny joke, but Miura just looks confused.

“But the Tokyo location--” Miura starts, but Sasaki waves a hand and she cuts herself off, going silent.

“I know none of you have been there in a while, but you’ll have to trust me on this,” Sasaki says, her voice patient and calm. “I’ve been preparing this for a long time, you know. I wouldn’t let it go poorly, no matter what.” She grins, and Izuku isn’t sure that he likes the look on her face.

“I’m assuming we need weapons,” Fury says. “Any limitations on that?” Sasaki nods, her gaze moving over to him.

“You can bring your normal gear, but makes sure to have silencers on any firearms,” she says. “I think it’ll turn out better if Sumire handles the firepower, but it won’t hurt to have a backup on you, Kazuo.” Fury nods, seemingly satisfied as he leans back in his chair and crosses his arms over his chest. Sasaki turns to Shinsou, her lips curling up into a smile.

“Shinsou, your main job will be to prevent officials from reporting the break in,” Sasaki says. “I’d also like you to assist with getting through the second checkpoint within the prison, which involves getting an officer on the other side of the wall to disable a lock.” She waves a hand. “It should be child’s play for you, really.”

Shinsou nods. “I’m assuming we’ll be in teams,” he says, and Izuku doesn’t miss the fact that it’s not worded as a question. From the way that Sasaki’s smile widens and her eyes narrow, she notices too. Either that, or the issue of teams is something that excites her; Izuku isn’t sure.

“You and Midoriya will be together,” Sasaki says, her eyes moving over to Izuku. “I assume that won’t be a problem?” she asks, and from the hint of amusement in her voice, Izuku knows that she can tell they’re fighting. Izuku swallows.

“It’s--it’s fine with me,” Izuku says quietly. Next to him, Shinsou sighs.

“It won’t be an issue,” Shinsou says, his tone clinical and detached. Izuku feels a heavy weight in his stomach.

“Good,” Sasaki purrs, her eyes narrowing slightly as she leans back. “I hope that you’re as excited for this as I am,” she says, reaching a hand up to press it against her cheek. “This will be *wonderful*,” she says. Izuku has to hold back a shiver.

“You haven’t actually told us much,” Shinsou says, and Izuku stiffens at his tone, harsh and blunt.

“We don’t know the layout of the prison or where each team is going. We’re not going to be able to do our jobs without that information,” he says, and Izuku remembers, suddenly, that Shinsou never had to work with Fury. He remembers that Shinsou, for all he’s gone through, has only been with the Gekkeiju for about a month. Shinsou doesn’t know how they can hurt him, how they *will* hurt him and kill him if he messes up. Izuku suddenly feels very, very afraid, because that means that Shinsou doesn’t know to be *careful* .

Sasaki chuckles, shaking her head. “All in good time, Shinsou,” she says, and it’s like a parent telling a child that they’ll tell them when they’re older. “I have to be careful about this information, you know. If it got leaked to the police or to heroes, it would be disastrous.” She doesn’t move her gaze from Shinsou, doesn’t look at Izuku or give any visible sign that she suspects him, but Izuku feels like he’s being watched anyways. He swallows, hoping that his nerves aren’t showing to the other people around him.

Sasaki’s gaze moves around the room. “I hope all of you understand how big this is,” she says, her smile shifting into something sinister and dark. Izuku feels, suddenly, like he’s back in the morgue, surrounded by suffocating silence. As Sasaki cracks a grin, her head tilting to the side slightly, though, Izuku feels something *wrong* , something uneasy and uncomfortable rise within him.

“After all,” Sasaki says, “we’re about to make history.”

Chapter End Notes

content warning: talk of suicide and self harm, talk of abuse

[discord!](#) [carrd!](#)

i hope you all are pogging hard! i have been packing to move back home for the summer and I HATE PACKING!!

anticipation

Chapter Summary

last time: izuku vibes with kacchan and also talks to da sasaki

Chapter Notes

hi sorry this is late my new update schedule is "when i feel like it but at least once a week" sorry for the inconsistency im a college student

also next chappie might be a little late bc it's a BIG DEAL and I don't wanna fuck it up
pog

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

With all that's going on in his other life, returning to school feels nothing but strange.

Izuku had missed everyone else moving back in, had been out at the tower and then on patrol. It hadn't *felt* like the entire day, hadn't seemed like that long, but when he'd gotten back in the early hours of the morning, he'd noticed the signs of life in the common area, seen all of the towels and toiletries in the bathroom. It had felt weird to wake up in his room and know that all of the rooms above and below him were occupied, know that his friends were back.

It's even more strange sitting in the classroom, fiddling with the cap of his pen as Aizawa shuffles around with papers at his desk. The class is filled with a low chatter, more noise than Izuku is used to, and he feels almost naked like this, in a classroom full of people. He's been around people over break, of course, but it's usually when he's outside with his mask and goggles and costume. It feels vulnerable, to be sitting here in just his uniform, even though the long sleeves and pants don't really show any of his skin.

"Midoriya," Tsuyu croaks, startling Izuku but not enough for him to jump. "How was your break?" She looks pretty much the same as before, with her hair up in a neat ponytail and her notes on her desk. There's a curious look on her face, and Izuku remembers that he'd hardly texted anyone over the break, hadn't even *opened* the group chat. He swallows, giving her a friendly smile.

"I-It was good," he says. "How about--how about yours?" He sees her nod, and next to her, Uraraka turns to look at them as Tsuyu replies.

"It was nice, ribbit." Tsuyu glances to the side. "Much too cold to do anything outside, so we stayed inside most of it." Izuku nods, remembering that Tsuyu doesn't do well with cold.

"I built so many snowmen!" Uraraka says, grinning brightly. "I've been sending Tsuyu pics to make her jealous."

"I wasn't jealous," Tsuyu says, and if it was anyone else, Izuku might think she was lying. "I was quite happy without snow."

Uraraka giggles before glancing over to Izuku. “Did you guys get much snow here? Back home we got *way* more than usual. It was pretty awesome,” she says, tipping her head to the side ever so slightly. Izuku nods.

“W-We got quite a bit,” he says. “I didn’t--I didn’t really do much with it, but I like walking in it.” He doesn’t say that he also likes to sleep in it, since that’d be dangerous for most people, but he thinks about it. The snow, clean and cold and fresh, clinging to his skin, is a type of stinging bright pain different from any other, and Izuku still thinks about it longingly. If Kacchan wasn’t watching him so closely, Izuku might try to sneak away next time it snowed just to sit in it.

“It’s pretty from a distance,” Tsuyu says. “I don’t really see the appeal of freezing to death, ribbit.” For her, it’s pretty dramatic, and Izuku can’t help but smile along as Uraraka chuckles.

“We should totally hang out some,” Uraraka says, leaning forward. “I didn’t see either of you at all over the break, and Deku doesn’t even check his texts!” There’s a smile on her face, but Izuku knows that she’d prefer if he texted more, if he was more engaged in general. Izuku doesn’t want to make excuses, not when he can’t tell them the real reason.

“I’m going--I’ll be pretty busy at the start of the semester,” he says, chewing on his lower lip. “But, um, after work-studies end, I-I should have more time?” It comes out like a question, but Uraraka nods, smiling wide. Tsuyu seems satisfied, too, nodding.

“I’ll be looking forward to it!” Uraraka says, pumping a fist in the air. Her smile is contagious, and even though it feels wrong to be happy with everything that’s going on, Izuku finds it in himself to smile, too.

--

Izuku’s sitting on the floor of Kacchan’s room, his textbook open in his lap and turned to their reading assignment from English when there’s a knock on Kacchan’s door. It doesn’t startle Izuku, but it does surprise him, especially when he looks up at Kacchan. The other boy doesn’t look surprised at all, standing up from the chair at his desk and moving over to the door. He doesn’t even look through the peephole before unlocking the door and pulling it open.

“About time,” he grumbles. He’s blocking Izuku’s view of whoever it is at the door, and Izuku leans back and cranes his neck to try and get a better look. It doesn’t really matter, though, because after a few moments, Kacchan steps back. Izuku watches as Neito steps into the room, his blue eyes on Izuku and a soft smile on his face.

“Hey, Izuku,” Neito says, his smile growing. “Missed me?” he asks, and Izuku watches Kacchan scoff and roll his eyes.

“As if anyone would miss your annoying ass,” Kacchan mutters, earning himself an elbow in the ribs from Neito.

“Did I ask you?” Neito quips back, rolling his eyes before turning to look back at Izuku. “Seriously though, how have you been?” he asks, his smile returning to his face.

“I’ve been good,” Izuku says. “How was--how was your break?” he asks, pushing the textbook off of his lap and setting it down on the floor. He watches Neito track his movements with his eyes as he does, and Izuku feels a little awkward for being the only one sitting.

“It was good,” Neito says. “I would have liked to hear from you a little more,” he says, and he stares down at Izuku seriously. “Katsuki told me that you told him,” he says, and Izuku swallows

thickly.

“Yeah,” Izuku says, a little choked up. Neito hums, walking forward and plopping down onto the ground beside Izuku.

“I’m glad you did,” Neito says. “It was getting kind of annoying having to avoid his questions.” The edges of his lips quirk up the tiniest bit. “How are you doing?” he asks, and Izuku knows what he’s asking about.

“I’m--I’m okay, really,” Izuku says. He looks down at the floor, at his criss-crossed legs. “I’ll be better when--when the stuff with the villains is over,” he admits. He hears Neito hum in acknowledgement.

“Do you have time to play cards?” Neito asks, and when Izuku blinks up at him, he sees his friend holding up a familiar, battered box of playing cards. Izuku smiles, casting a glance over to Kacchan.

“Sure,” Izuku says. “W-We can play games that need more than two people,” he says.

“Yup,” Neito says, and Izuku watches as he waves a hand at Kacchan. “C’mon, sit your ass down.” He starts to shuffle the cards against the floor as Kacchan scoffs.

“I don’t want to sit on the damn floor,” he says, but he sits down anyway.

Izuku might not be able to *forget* about the Gekkeiju, but he doesn’t think about them quite as much while he’s with his friends

--

Sharpening his knives has been a part of his routine for a while now. Izuku likes to do it at night, after he gets back from patrol, if he has time. It’s one of those nights now, and even though he can hear the sounds of his friends chattering in the living area of the common room, Izuku doesn’t feel much like joining his classmates. Instead, he’s at the dining room table, a set of whetstones, a damp cloth, and a bowl of water set out in front of him. To his side, most of his knives are laid out on the table, shining in the artificial yellow light of the dorms.

He’s surprised, honestly, that nobody’s asked him about it. It’s not *loud*, really, but it isn’t silent either, not as he drags the blades of the knives across the whetstones with a quiet *shick* sound. He’s not trying to hide it, either, so he thinks the lack of questions must just be because it makes sense--Izuku fights with knives, so he’d need to sharpen them. Of all the things that have been done in the dorm, it certainly isn’t one of the strangest.

Izuku’s not used to doing this with background noise, though. He can hear his own sounds just fine, the rhythmic grating of the knife against the stone, the soft splashing sounds when he wets his cloth to wipe metal dust off of the whetstone and the blade, and the sounds of the knives clinking against the table when he sets one down and picks up another. It’s just that he can hear another layer of sound over it, the cheerful music playing on the TV, the whoops and cheers when something happens in the show his classmates are watching. Right now, there’s even the low hum of the microwave as Sero heats up a bag of instant popcorn.

Izuku’s not sure if he likes it or not. On one hand, it’s certainly bright, more uplifting. He feels more awake and more alive than he would normally while doing this, but it also ruins some of the ritual for him. It’s no longer this soothing, repetitive task, no longer something that he can zone out while he does, and he misses the peace. Izuku tries not to think about it as his friends messing it up,

as them getting in his way--after all, he could just do this in his own bedroom if he really wanted peace and quiet. It's just *different*, something that he used to think he had complete control over, and now he doesn't. Izuku gets the sense that lately, he's been losing more and more control with each passing moment, and he hates it.

Izuku tries not to dwell on it. He focuses on the movements of the knife over the stone, focuses on the small vibrations moving up through the blade and into his hand. He focuses on the sound, the smooth grinding sound as he moves to the finer grit whetstone.

Izuku sharpens his knives, and he breathes.

--

Izuku's been thinking about visiting Haruta for a while now, but he doesn't remember consciously making the choice to actually do it. He doesn't think that he has, actually, even now that he's standing at the entrance to the 2A dorm, where Haruta should still live with Ema and Maka.

I don't even know if he's here right now, Izuku tells himself as he stares up at the building. It's mostly identical to the 1A dorm, with the same smooth concrete surface and bright, shining glass in the windows, the same concrete steps leading up to it, but it has a different label on it of course, and it's further from the woods. It's strange, to see something that's so close to his home but off just a little bit. It's like someone's moved all of the objects in his room to the right a few inches--it's off, but he can't necessarily tell what, specifically, is making it feel wrong.

It's after class on one of the days that Izuku's actually going to attend this week, and he knows that he should be training or patrolling right now, but something tells him that he needs to do this now. There are only a few days until the jailbreak, and Izuku doesn't think that he's going to work up the courage again, even if he has the free time that he needs to do something like this. This is the last day he's planning to go to class before the 28th, and he has so many meetings scheduled in the time before that he doubts that he'd get another chance as good as this one.

So, Izuku stares up at the building, lit up white with the reflection of the afternoon sun, and he takes a deep breath. He walks up the few steps that he has left, up to the door, and he twists the knob. Visitors to his dorm don't knock, so he assumes that it'd be pointless to do it here. The door opens smoothly, and Izuku steps into a common area that's identical to his own, except that the colors inside are all blues instead of the greens of his dorm. It's strange, to say the least, but it doesn't make him nearly as uncomfortable as when the eyes of everyone in the common room turn to him, regarding him with a mixture of curiosity, surprise, and even a little hostility. Izuku swallows, scanning over the students--there are about ten of them here--to look for a familiar face.

"Midoriya?" Maka asks at the exact same time Izuku spots her, wearing a tank top and shorts and standing in the kitchen. "What on earth are you doing here?" She sounds more confused than she does hostile, which Izuku is grateful for. *Her hair is wet*, he notes. *She must have just showered*.

"I-I wanted to talk to Haruta," Izuku says, and he's surprised at how brave he sounds, how little he stutters. He supposes that at least with Maka, he can tell himself that any fear he feels is because of her quirk and not any real danger.

Maka's eyes narrow. "Why?" she asks, simple and blunt. She doesn't give any sign of what she's thinking, but she does step out of the kitchen area and walk towards Izuku. The other students turn away one by one, going back to whatever it was they were doing before, and Izuku breathes out in relief at the lessening of the attention on him. He's not fond of the sensation of being watched, not at all.

“He--he hasn’t been at any of the meetings,” Izuku says, swallowing and casting his gaze down to the floor instead of at Maka’s eyes, which are darker than Kacchan’s, almost an oxblood color, really. He can still see her eyes narrowing in his peripheral vision, though.

“That’s a good thing,” Maka says. “But Ema and I have been wondering the same thing. He isn’t telling us shit, but you can try if you want,” she says, sighing and reaching up a hand to run it through her damp curls. “I’ll have to text him first, give me a sec.” She reaches into the pockets of her shorts, producing a bright red cell phone. Izuku waits, unmoving and quiet, as she types on the phone for a moment before staring at the screen.

“H-How have you been?” Izuku asks, because he doesn’t really understand Maka but if he’s learned anything from Sasaki it’s that manners can get you a long, long way. Maka glances up at him, one eyebrow quirked up slightly as if she’s surprised by the question.

“I’ve been fine,” she says, looking back down at the phone. “Haruta’s finally decided to actually talk to us, so I suppose I can’t complain.” She squints at the screen. “He’ll talk with you, yeah,” she says, sliding her phone into her pocket and straightening up. “Let’s go.”

Izuku nods, following after her when she starts walking back, towards where there’s a staircase that looks identical to the one that is in the 1A dorm. It’s familiar, especially considering that the wall is the same cool gray as it is in Izuku’s dorm. He follows her as she walks up the stairs, noting the fact that he can smell her quirk, that scent that’s almost like fresh baked bread but not quite.

“What--what has he told you?” Izuku asks, swallowing. “I mean, did he--”

“You’ll probably want to ask him yourself,” Maka says, glancing back down at him from where she’s a few steps ahead of him. “I don’t know everything, and he’ll do a better job of explaining than I would, anyway.”

“R-Right,” Izuku says. He resists the urge to twist his hands together, resists the urge to bite at his lip or something like that. He tells himself that he’s nervous because of Maka’s quirk, nothing else, and it kind of works.

“You’re not afraid of me anymore,” Maka says as they reach the top of the stairs on the fourth floor, and Izuku blinks. A tiny smile forms on her lips as she looks back at him. “What’s changed?”

Izuku shrugs, but he answers anyways because he thinks that he knows the answer.

“I’ve--I’ve seen stuff that’s--that’s really scary,” he says. “It’s--your quirk is just the feeling. There’s nothing--nothing behind it.” He swallows, wondering if he’s said the wrong thing for a moment, before Maka rolls her eyes, scoffing with a light laugh as she turns to face forward again.

“You’ve got a backbone, kid,” she says, even though Izuku’s pretty sure that she’s around the same age as his. Izuku smiles, and he follows her as she walks forward towards a door that’s decorated with a ton of pink paper cranes. Izuku doesn’t have to wonder which room is Ema’s; it’s not exactly subtle, even before Ema opens the door even before they get there, a bright grin on her face and her grey ears twitching with excitement.

“Midoriya!” she says, stepping forward from the doorway. “It’s been ages, how have you been?” Izuku can’t help but feel a little bit surprised, given that the last time that they met it was because she and Maka were trying to figure out if Izuku was involved with hurting her brother, but then he remembers the hug she’d given him last time, the way that she’d been so quick to accept that he wasn’t trying to hurt *anyone*.

“I’ve b-been good,” he says, giving her a smile. “H-How about--” he starts, and she’s answering him even before he’s finished.

“I’m good, I’m good!” she says, stopping in front of him. “Can I hug you? You stress me out so much, you know. I worry about you and Shinsou and Haruta all the time.” Izuku blinks, nodding as soon as he actually processes the question. Ema moves forward and pulls him into a quick hug, releasing him after just a moment.

“Haruta’s in here,” she says, pulling away and moving to the still open door to the room. Izuku nods, stepping forward as she gestures for him to go inside.

Ema’s dorm room is decorated so heavily that Izuku has a hard time even recognizing it as a dorm room at all. The floor is blanketed in a thick, grey carpet, and the bed has a matching grey bedspread and fluffy pink pillows scattered across it. The walls have all been draped with pale pink fabric, and all of the surfaces have been covered with something to make them look like they’re made of white marble instead of wood. Haruta’s sitting on the bed, holding a pillow to his chest as he sits cross legged. When Izuku steps into the room, Ema and Maka coming in and closing the door behind him, Haruta gives Izuku a small nod.

“Hi,” Haruta says, his voice quiet. Ema moves to plop down in the chair at her desk, and Maka moves past Izuku, to a large pink bean bag chair on the floor, which she settles into easily. Izuku gets the sense that this is where the three of them spend most of their time--they all seem comfortable here, like it’s routine for them to be in this room at the same time.

“Um, hi,” Izuku says, swallowing. Haruta stares at him, letting out a soft sigh.

“You wanted to--to talk about the Gekkeiju, right?” Haruta asks. Izuku can see that Maka and Ema are paying close attention, their eyes glued to Haruta as he speaks. *They want to know just as badly as I do*, Izuku thinks.

“Y-Yeah,” Izuku says, shuffling back and forth on his feet. “It’s just--I haven’t seen you at all, and I don’t--I don’t know why,” he explains, chewing at his lower lip. Haruta nods, looking down at the floor.

“I don’t really know either,” he says quietly. “I haven’t been given any mission, and--and I haven’t even seen the lieutenants.” Haruta sighs, reaching up to move a strand of silver hair out of his face. “I think they’re trying to prevent me from hearing about something,” he says, and it’s exactly what Izuku’d been thinking from the moment that Haruta had stopped showing up at the tower.

“Do you--do you think you’re in danger?” Izuku asks. Haruta doesn’t seem surprised at the question, but he shakes his head.

“Not if they haven’t already--already killed me,” he says. “I think that--that it would raise more suspicions right now if they got rid of me, so they’re letting me live.” He glances up at Izuku, his eyes bright blue in contrast to all of the pink in the room. “I’m more worried about you if I’m--if I’m honest,” he says, and Izuku can’t help but swallow, nodding as his throat goes tight for just a moment.

“I’ll be okay,” Izuku says, but he thinks *I can’t die*. Haruta stares back at him for a long moment.

“There are worse things,” Haruta says, voice whisper-soft, and Izuku can’t tear his eyes away from Haruta for a long moment. He can’t look away, even though he knows that Ema and Maka are probably making faces or exchanging a glance or *something*, because he’s sure both of them are used to Haruta enough by now that they can tell he’d just replied to something Izuku thought.

“I’ll--I’ll be okay,” Izuku says again, because he knows that there are worse things than death and he thinks that it’ll be worth it to go through those things if it means that he can prevent this from happening to anyone else, can prevent Sasaki from hurting more people. Haruta stares at him.

“I wish I were as brave as you,” Haruta says, turning his gaze downward again. “I’m--I’m going to take this chance. If they don’t ask me to--to go back, I’m not going to.” His voice is thick with guilt, and Izuku doesn’t have to be a mind reader to know that Haruta feels like he’s being selfish for not putting himself on the line the same way Izuku is.

“You’re braver than I am,” Izuku says, and he means it. “You went through--went through that *alone*,” Izuku says, biting at his lower lip. “Nobody thinks that you’re--that you’re not brave.”

Haruta looks back up at him, staring for what feels like minutes before a tiny smile appears on his lips. He looks at Izuku, breathes out, and speaks.

“You’re going to be an amazing hero,” Haruta says. “Okay? So you--you have to survive this.” He looks up at Izuku, and Izuku can’t do anything except nod once, his throat suddenly very, very tight.

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“And that’s all you’ve been told?” Rivera asks, his frown deepening. “There weren’t any text correspondences, nothing like that?”

“N-No, that’s it,” Izuku says, swallowing around the dryness in his throat. “We don’t--we don’t know much,” he admits, and it doesn’t help the nerves he has surrounding this whole thing. He doesn’t think that he’s ready for the 28th, doesn’t think he’s ready for what’s going to happen only two days from now. He’d guess that Shinsou isn’t ready either, but it’s hard to tell from the bored mask he wears all the time now. Izuku doesn’t understand how Shinsou’s able to look that bored, that disdainful, in any situation. Izuku has never been able to hide his true feelings that well.

“The stakes of this raid are high,” Rivera says, his gaze fixed on Izuku. “And the risk is even higher, especially given the limited intel we’re working off of.” He pauses, reaching up to adjust his tie. “That’s why the Commission is authorizing the use of a full team, including Mirko, myself, Koizumi, Eraserhead, Nighteye, and Hawks.” Rivera’s gaze doesn’t leave Izuku, even though he’s surely talking to more people than just him.

“I’ll be there, too,” Ren says. “Is that everyone?” she asks, and Rivera shakes his head, his dark green eyes moving over to Ren.

“No. There will be more heroes involved, but the core team is those of us who are already familiar with the Gekkeiju.” He turns his gaze back to Izuku. “The plan right now is that we wait on standby with two teams, one at Tartarus and the other ready to move quickly in Tokyo. We’ll use the tracking device in your wires to intercept you just as you’re arriving at the other base, hopefully allowing the fighting to take place outside and not on the Gekkeiju’s turf,” he explains, and Izuku finds himself nodding.

“Do you mind sharing your quirk with us, if you’re going to be there?” Nighteye asks, pushing his glasses up on the bridge of his nose. “Forgive me for making this assumption, but you don’t seem to have much in the way of combat ability.” It’s something that Izuku had been wondering, too-- Rivera’s on the older side, probably in his forties, and he doesn’t seem to have a lot of muscle. When Izuku had looked him up, it had looked like he’d been a detective his whole life, not someone who would have participated in any kind of combat.

Rivera sighs, sliding the papers on the table in front of him to the side. He leans forward, resting his forearms against the table and staring down at the wooden surface like it'll speak for him. A few strands of his hair, dark and streaked with tiny lines of silver, hang down in front of his face as he begins to speak.

"My combat ability is limited, at least compared to those that we will be fighting," Rivera says. "But I am not without my uses. My quirk is called Circadian Rhythm, although the name does a poor job of explaining what it does." Rivera looks up, and Izuku can see that still, he's looking at Izuku. "My quirk allows me to manipulate the speed of life around me. I can speed up healing, speed up dying, grow plants at exceptional rates, and I can accelerate recharge rates of quirks with a cooldown time." Rivera reaches up, runs a hand through his hair. "I can also slow someone's life processes. I can stop someone from dying of poison or bleeding out, and I can slow and disable opponents. My quirk is non-discriminatory, however." He looks down at the table. "When it is active, everyone in its range, including myself, will be affected to the same degree."

"So... it's a healing quirk?" Ren asks, leaning forward. "I don't really get what the big deal is. Most healing quirks have drawbacks, so--"

"It's not just a drawback," Rivera says, sighing. "My quirk won't heal wounds unless they *would* heal on their own. And if someone *thinks* their injury will heal but it's infected, it'll kill them." He leans back in his chair, crossing his arms over his chest. "It also has quite drastic effects on the surrounding plant life if I use the accelerating effect, and if I use the slowing ability, I am unable to defend myself against attack because I will be moving slowly, too." He shrugs. "It can be a healing quirk, but more than that, it's a selective time quirk. In the past, some of its greatest use has come from the fact that it applies its effects to my own body."

"So," Koizumi says, leaning forward excitedly. "Rivera can help out with healing, he can stop an opponent, or he can kill someone *super* quick if they're already injured. It's really versatile!"

"It's really *dangerous*," Rivera says, rolling his eyes. "It's dangerous, and it's hard to use correctly, which is why I rarely decide to use it." He glances over to Ren. "Chances are good that you and I will be put on different teams, since we can both serve a role as healers. I would like to ask if you have a preference whether you face the lieutenants at their base or if you want to be at the prison initially."

Ren blinks, looking startled. "You're asking me what I want?" she asks, incredulously, before she relaxes, twisting her mouth to the side as she thinks. "I think it'd be better to have me at the prison," she says after a moment. "Because, if I'm being honest, I think that I'll end up killing Fury if I get the chance, even if it means putting someone else at risk." She shrugs, giving an apologetic smile, and Izuku wonders how strong she is to think of Fury and want to fight rather than run and cry. Even now, the thought of facing Fury head on makes Izuku feel sick.

Rivera nods. "Then I'll be with the team that intercepts the Gekkeiju's transport," he says. His gaze moves to Izuku and Shinsou. "I know that the two of you have very little choice in this matter, and that some degree of that is because of my decisions. Are you two able to work with me if that is necessary?"

Izuku frowns. He glances to Shinsou, who doesn't even spare Izuku a look before replying, meeting Rivera's gaze with a level, even stare.

"I don't care," Shinsou says. "Do what you want." As he replies, Rivera nods, before his gaze slides over to Izuku.

"It's--it's fine," Izuku says. "You haven't--" he stops, swallows. "If we capture the Gekkeiju, then

it won't--then I don't care what I've had to do to make it happen." Izuku doesn't care if he gets hurt. Izuku doesn't care what happens to himself, at this point. They're *so close*.

Rivera stares back at him for a moment, before nodding. "I feel the same way," Rivera replies, and Izuku feels like he's missed something.

Chapter End Notes

content warnings: talk of suicide/self harm, uhhhh i think dissociation lol idk

[discord!](#) [carrrd!](#)

pog hard my besties one final left at 8 am tomorrow wish me the lucks

28th (part 1)

Chapter Summary

last time: we are FAST approaching the Big Day boys.... meeting full of rivera being sus and izuku being nervous

Chapter Notes

hi im back!! sorry for disappearing i got distracted

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

The morning of the 28th comes too quickly.

It's a dove-grey morning, with low cloud cover that covers the tops of the tallest buildings in a thin white haze, and it's unusually warm for the dead of winter. It's not *warm*, really, but it's warm enough that Izuku's Ace costume is comfortable rather than just a bit too thin. Izuku would know, because the first thing he did this morning (even though they aren't meant to meet the Gekkeiju until the afternoon) was walk through the woods in his costume, breathing in the cool air and watching the fog twist and twirl through the dark green boughs of the pine trees.

It's afternoon now, though, and Izuku thinks that the morning both came and went far too fast. Izuku is both beyond ready to be done with the Gekkeiju and not ready at all to face what this day will bring. He's still not totally sure what's meant to happen today, which he thinks is part of why he's so nervous, but knowing that does nothing to resolve the unease building in his chest as he waits in the common area, his hands in his pockets and his sharpened knives heavy on his belt and tucked into his sleeves.

He hears Shinsou start down the stairs long before he sees him, and he knows that Shinsou's being loud for Izuku's benefit--Shinsou is plenty capable of moving silently after all this time in the Gekkeiju. Izuku does Shinsou the favor of not staring at him, just looking off to the side slightly and raising a hand in greeting as Shinsou steps down onto the floor of the common area from the last step of the stairs.

It's still painfully awkward, *hostile* even, between the two of them, but Izuku's immensely grateful for the fact that Shinsou seems determined not to let that get in between their work. He gives Izuku a nod, his hands in his own pockets as he walks over to Izuku.

"You ready to head out?" Shinsou asks, angling his head towards the door. He's hardly spoken to Izuku since Izuku told Aizawa about his parents, and it sends a little thrill through Izuku that Shinsou is acknowledging him at all, after what Izuku did.

"Y-Yeah," Izuku says, and he moves to the door, pulling it open and holding it that way so Shinsou can move through. Shinsou's in what has sort of become his costume, a pair of dark, almost black violet slacks and a white button down shirt tucked in, with an open blazer that matches the slacks. His wild hair is still untamed, and it contrasts with the relatively formal outfit, but Izuku's noticed

before that Shinsou never wears a tie, even though he's certain that he would have been given one. It's the little things, the little rebellions that Shinsou does, like not fixing his hair and not wearing his tie, that reminds Izuku that Shinsou hasn't had the same experience in the Gekkeiju that Haruta and Izuku have. It's both painful to know and amazing. Izuku thinks he might be jealous, but he's not sure.

Shinsou moves through the door and out into the clean morning air. Izuku follows him, watching as Shinsou's nose wrinkles as he raises a hand to shield his eyes, glancing up at the grey sky.

"It's going to rain," he says, softly, mostly to himself, and Izuku watches as his face relaxes as his eyes adjust to the light. Izuku nods, unsure if he's meant to respond.

"At least it's warm," he says, barely above a whisper, and he sees Shinsou's eyes slide over to him.

"I don't think that's going to matter much today," Shinsou says, and Izuku can't help the wave of anxiety that rushes over him. He nods, jerkily and too-fast, and the two of them start their walk to the train station.

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The tower looks like it always does, and for some reason, that surprises Izuku. He thinks that it probably should look strange, should look more... menacing, or maybe smaller, since they're taking down the Gekkeiju today. *Well, we will be if this goes well*, Izuku reminds himself. He tries not to think about the possibility of failure, but the idea of getting his hopes up is also terrifying in its own right. Izuku doesn't really want to expect more than he gets, doesn't want to have to deal with disappointment if something goes wrong, but at the same time, it's hard *not* to hope for this to work after all of this time.

"We should go in," Shinsou says, looking back at Izuku from where he's a few steps ahead of him, and Izuku realizes that he's frozen in place a few steps back. Izuku gives himself a little shake before hurrying forward, moving to stand beside Shinsou as Shinsou pushes open the door, holding it open for Izuku with what might be a hint of a smile on his face. Izuku feels a little bubble of something like hope build in his throat, and he gives Shinsou a weak smile and a little nod as he steps into the tower.

"Welcome," Sasaki says, and Izuku swears he nearly jumps a foot in the air when he sees her, her back leaning against the counter. Yamamoto is in her usual spot at the computer, typing furiously. Izuku wonders, briefly, what she's doing, but he's immediately distracted by the fact that Sasaki is *waiting for them* in the lobby of all places. Manami, Fury, and Miura are all there, too, standing a little off to the side, with Manami talking quietly to Fury and Miura typing on her phone.

"Hey," Shinsou says as he walks up behind Izuku, standing beside him. "We're leaving right away, then," he says, and Izuku notices that it's not phrased as a question. He wonders if Sasaki had made it a rule that Shinsou couldn't ask questions, or if Shinsou had imposed that on himself.

"Yes, we are," Sasaki says, tipping her head to the side slightly. When Izuku thinks about it, Shinsou's powers almost certainly activate even with just a statement, he thinks. He remembers him saying rude phrases at the sports festival--not questions--and it working, but Izuku can't be sure. He wishes now that he'd asked Shinsou about it. His head feels all full of information, all messed up and confused, and he can't remember for certain.

"Who's driving?" Fury asks, taking a step forward to stand side by side with Sasaki. His eyes, shielded by dark glass, are fixed on Izuku, and Izuku swallows uneasily.

“Sumire is,” Sasaki says, her lips quirking up in a smile. Izuku sees Miura sigh behind her, sliding the phone into her pocket. “Are we good to go then, Yamamoto?” Sasaki asks, turning to look at the woman behind the counter.

Yamamoto nods. “It’s all set, boss,” she says, and Izuku thinks that he sees tension in her shoulders, in the thin downward turn of her lips. Izuku wonders if he’s imagining it, or if Yamamoto is as nervous for this as they are. He isn’t sure why she would be, but he supposes that it makes sense--it’s important for the whole organization.

“Great!” Sasaki says, clapping her hands together. Izuku realizes she’s dressed different than normal; she’s wearing a knee length, black dress, but there’s also what looks to be golden armor over her forearms and shins, gilded and shiny. She’s also wearing a matching golden belt with a pistol and a few pouches made of black leather hanging off of it. There are golden chains, thin and glittering, woven through her dark wings, and she has matching golden plating over her horns. Izuku glances down and sees that she’s wearing sturdy, heavy-looking boots made of black material. He wonders how much the armor is decorative and how much it’s made for fighting--he doesn’t know if Sasaki would really *need* to fight, with her quirk and all.

“Let’s get going,” she says, and she starts in Izuku’s direction. Izuku flinches back instinctively, bracing himself for a hit until he realizes that Sasaki is moving *past* him, towards the door. Izuku steps out of the way, letting her past him. She opens the door, tugging it open and holding it as she gestures.

“After you,” she purrs, her too-bright eyes narrowing into thin slits of acid-green. Izuku swallows, feeling uneasy as he steps through the door back into the cool January air. It’s wet with mist, and Izuku breathes in a breath of it. It feels, eerily, like it might be his last.

Sasaki moves quickly once the rest of the team step into the outside, leading them around the side of the tower, towards where Izuku knows there’s a parking lot. There’s something surreal about the fact that the Gekkeiju park in a *normal parking lot*, but Izuku can’t see any other way to do it when Miura stops in front of what appears to be a completely normal minivan. It’s not like they’d be able to move stealthily in something dramatic, a sleek black car like you see in the movies, but the old blue minivan is still ridiculously normal. Miura slides a hand into her pocket, pulling out a set of keys. She unlocks it manually, sliding the key into the lock in the driver’s side door and tugging the door open, pressing a switch.

“The boss has shotgun,” Miura says, and it feels almost silly. Izuku wants to laugh, except he doesn’t think that it’d be appropriate. He hangs back as Sasaki moves to the front passenger seat and Miura gets into the driver’s side. Manami sits behind Miura, and Izuku watches Fury hop into the car, beckoning Izuku and Shinsou in.

“The two of you will be in the far back with me,” he says, gesturing to the back of the seven-seat car. Izuku swallows, nodding jerkily, and he feels Shinsou’s eyes on him. He knows that Shinsou knows what Fury’s done to him, but that Shinsou also hasn’t *experienced* it, that Shinsou’s not going to *get* why Izuku is so terrified to sit with Fury. Izuku knows that it’s something strange, because there’s no good reason for Fury to sit with them rather than in the seat behind Sasaki, and Izuku isn’t looking forward to whatever the reason is.

Izuku climbs into the backseat of the car anyway, his hands shaking as he does so. He tries not to listen to the sound of Shinsou following him as Izuku sits on the far left seat in the back, hoping desperately that Shinsou will take the middle seat and prevent Izuku from having to sit beside Fury. Izuku’s still not surprised when Shinsou takes the seat furthest from Izuku, leaving the middle seat open when Fury slides into it, his long legs folded up in front of him and a predatory

grin on his face. Izuku takes a deep breath and presses the palms of his hands into the fabric of his pants, trying not to pay attention to Fury's body heat or the fact that he's close enough that Izuku can hear his breathing.

"Are you all ready?" Miura asks, and Izuku can see her eyes on them in the rearview mirror. Izuku gets the sudden sense that he's on some kind of twisted, messed-up family road trip, and it makes his stomach twist in a way that he doesn't really understand, makes him have to stifle a hysterical giggle. He knows that these are dangerous villains, that these people have killed him before and likely will do it again, but there's something comical about piling into a minivan with them for a drive to the big city. It's almost funnier *because* Izuku's probably dying at least once today.

"Good to go!" Manami chirps from the middle row of seats and that seems to be good enough for Miura. She gives a nod and turns back to the front of the vehicle, turning the key in the ignition and starting the car.

Izuku hears the locks engage in the doors, and his mouth is suddenly dry. He doesn't know what changes as they start to pull out of the parking lot, doesn't know if it's a change in one of the villain's body language or just that the doors weren't locked before and they are now, but Izuku's blood fills with adrenaline and he knows to expect what's coming next. When Fury reaches out and grabs Izuku's wrist with a hot hand, Izuku doesn't flinch because he's expecting it.

"It's been a while," Fury says, and Izuku looks anywhere but his face. He hasn't been through this before, so he doesn't know for *sure*, but he can guess. "Hasn't it?" Fury asks.

"Y-Yeah," Izuku says, and in his peripheral vision, he sees Fury's other hand reaching up to adjust his sunglasses. Izuku swallows, his eyes sliding shut. It's not like he'd be able to avoid anything in the cramped space of the back of the car, anyway.

"You know, usually by now, people come to me *begging* for another taste of my quirk," Fury says, conversationally as if he isn't cornering Izuku and basically *threatening* him. "I'm surprised that you haven't. Don't take this personally, but you never seemed all that strong-willed."

Izuku opens his eyes, looks past Fury to Shinsou. Shinsou's watching him with something that might be alarm in his eyes, a grim set to his mouth. Izuku thinks that Shinsou's probably afraid to see what's about to happen rather than afraid that it'll happen to him instead. Izuku tries to convey through his facial expression that this is *bad*, that Fury shouldn't do this, but, well, Shinsou isn't a mind reader. Izuku hadn't realized how much he appreciated Haruta's quirk until he wasn't here when Izuku needed him.

"Look at me, Izuku," Fury says, and Izuku does flinch when Fury's other hand grips Izuku's chin, turning his face up to look Fury in the eyes, over the tops of his dark sunglasses. Izuku is too afraid to even really resist, and he only sees the bright gold for a heartbeat and a half before his body is filled with warmth.

Izuku thinks, distantly, that he hadn't remembered Heaven being *this* good. Izuku feels like he's molten glass, like he's biting into a chocolate chip cookie warm out of the oven or swimming in fresh, cool water on a summer day. He feels *relieved*, relaxed, like he's coming home. It washes over him in pieces, and it's gone too quickly as Fury pulls away, tilting his head back so that the sunglasses block Izuku's view of his eyes. There's a smirk on Fury's face, and Izuku can hear himself panting as he stares up at Fury, his limbs shaking where he's holding himself up, palms still pressed to his pants.

"There we go," Fury says, tipping his head to the side slightly and reaching up to fix his sunglasses. "I like you much better like this," he says, chuckling lightly, and a wave of sick disgust

washes over Izuku along with the stinging, bitter pain that the comedown brings. Izuku squeezes his eyes shut and hisses through the aching in his forearms, through the throbbing pain in his temples and the hot-coal sensation of breathing in the heated air in the car.

“Kazuo,” Miura says, warningly, from the front of the car. Izuku knows that it’s not going to make any difference, even before Fury starts to laugh.

“Aw, Sumire, he’s just too *easy*,” Fury says, and Izuku tries not to look at him, staring instead at the floor of the car as Fury keeps talking. “I mean, come on. It only took a couple of seconds, and now look at him.”

“Seems counterproductive,” Shinsou says drily, and Izuku blinks back his surprise. “It’ll make it difficult for him to be useful on the mission,” Shinsou points out, and that’s when Izuku puts it together. He wants to laugh, wants to cry or something, but he knows that Shinsou hasn’t figured it out yet, not if he’s asking about it. After all, Izuku just figured it out, even though now it seems so laughably obvious.

“Shinsou,” Izuku says, his voice a croak. “We’re not going on the mission,” he whispers as he lets his eyes slide shut and slumps back against the side of the car.

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Izuku doesn’t think he loses consciousness, necessarily, but he definitely loses time. When Izuku opens his eyes again, he can tell that he’s missed part of the conversation, that he’s missed something kind of important. There’s a heavy sort of silence in the car, and when Izuku turns to look out the window, he can see the outskirts of Tokyo around them. He hadn’t been watching that closely, but they’d only just left when Fury had used his quirk on him.

Izuku’s surprised, frankly, that they’re even going to Tokyo. He sighs when he moves himself away from the inner wall of the car, where he’d curled himself onto his side and pressed himself into the wall, as far away from Fury as he could get himself. He can feel eyes on him, but more than that, he hears an amused huff from Fury.

“Back with us now, are you?” he asks, and there’s a snide note to his voice. “You should have some words with your friend,” Fury says, rolling his eyes behind the dark glasses, and Izuku blinks, confused for a moment before Shinsou speaks.

“He’s not my friend,” Shinsou says, and it’s sharp. Izuku thinks that this isn’t the first time Shinsou’s said that, this conversation, and Izuku thinks that he might have passed out after all. It’s hard to tell, especially with the way his head feels all fuzzy and dull from Heaven. Izuku wants more, already, wants to ask Fury for just a few more moments, for just a taste.

“See, Izuku, he thinks that we’re stupid enough to reply to him,” Fury says, chuckling as he mimes wiping a tear away from his eye. “It’s kind of funny, to be honest. We had Mouse for so long after all, so of *course* we know how not to reply to someone with a response based quirk.” Fury laughs again, almost darkly this time, and Izuku hears Shinsou let out an irritated sigh.

“The doors are child-locked,” Shinsou says through gritted teeth. “And you know as well as I do that none of them are going to let me bust the window or get up front to get the wheel.” Izuku blinks, looking over to him.

“H-How long was I...?” Izuku starts, unable to finish. *I probably blacked out because of Heaven*, he thinks. *I don’t feel like I passed out, but there’s no other way.*

“About forty minutes,” Shinsou says, his voice dull and hard. “Did you know this was going to happen?” he asks, and it’s sharp, even sharper than Izuku expected.

“No,” Izuku says, looking Shinsou in the eyes. “I-I should have, but... no, I had no idea,” he says, and even just putting it into words makes him feel impossibly stupid. Why would the two of them go on a mission like this with just the three lieutenants and Sasaki? Why were they, members of UA, given such vital information? Why were they given so *little* information, if the mission were real?

“Me neither,” Shinsou says, and he looks down, at his lap. He opens his mouth like he’s about to say something else, but Sasaki cuts in from the front seat.

“It would be in both of your best interests to behave until we arrive at the Tokyo base,” Sasaki says, and Izuku can see the sly, catlike smile on her face as she looks back at them from the passenger seat. “I wouldn’t want to have to hurt either of you.”

Izuku exchanges a glance with Shinsou, and he kind of wishes there were more anger in Shinsou’s eyes. As it is, the thin gleam of fear that shows in the way that Shinsou’s eyes are a little too wide, the way that he’s chewing on the edge of his bottom lip makes Izuku feel like the ground has been pulled out from under him.

“I don’t think--” Izuku swallows. “I don’t think that there’s a-anything we can do,” he says, and he watches Shinsou’s brows furrow slightly. He watches Shinsou shake his head.

“What do you mean?” Shinsou asks, furious and energetic in a way that Izuku can’t be any more. “Why wouldn’t we--”

“You--you said it yourself,” Izuku says, cutting him off and shaking his head. “We can’t get out of the car, not--not with all of them here.” He can’t say what he wants to, that they might have a chance of escaping *after* they leave the car, that they have the wires in the hems of their clothes still and that they should stay still, they should *wait* and hope that the heroes will be able to save them.

“Fuck,” Shinsou says quietly, his wide eyes staring at Izuku. Izuku knows that he wants to say more, but they’re both all too aware of the Gekkeiju in the car with them.

“Now that you’re done with *that*,” Fury says, spitting it at them like they’re misbehaving kids. “Get those wires out of your clothes for me, will you?”

Izuku feels cold ice run up his spine, and he swallows hard, even before Fury cracks a grin, even before he starts to speak again.

“What,” he says, cocking an eyebrow up, “you didn’t think we’d notice?” Fury shakes his head, laughing. “All it took was a shot of trigger and Manami’s quirk and Yamamoto had no problems disabling them when you got to the tower.” Fury shrugs. “I mean, you could keep them, actually. I’d rather see them in person, though, since we went to the trouble of destroying them in the first place, you know?” Fury laughs, tipping his head back. His eyes would show around the glasses, but they’re squeezed shut with the force of his laughter. It doesn’t stop Izuku from shaking.

“Y-You knew?” he asks, before he can stop himself.

“Of course we knew,” Sasaki says, and her tone is patronizing, like she’s talking to a little kid. She doesn’t look back from the front seat, but her voice is loud and clear anyway. “It’s really a shame, to be honest. I was hoping I’d be able to turn you to our side at least, Midoriya.”

“How long did you know?” Shinsou asks, his voice loud and clear. Sasaki’s silence is almost as loud, and Izuku watches Shinsou clench his teeth together, the muscles in his jaw tensing.

“The wires,” Fury says, folding his arms over his chest. Izuku swallows. He reaches down, to the hem of his left sweater sleeve, and he fiddles with it for a moment before he manages to get the then, sharp end of the device to poke through the fabric. It only takes a few seconds to slide it out, like he always does before washing the costume, and the motion feels too routine for what he’s doing when he holds out the tiny machine. Fury sticks out a hand, and Izuku drops the wire into it, pretending that he doesn’t notice the way Fury is watching his shaking hand with a smirk.

“I’m not giving you my wire,” Shinsou says. “You don’t have any way of knowing if they’re actually disabled, do you?” He asks it in a challenging tone, like he’s daring someone to arm wrestle him. Izuku knows that it won’t work even before he sees the edge of Fury’s lips quirk up in a smirk.

Fury takes the wire, looking over it for a few moments before he seems satisfied. He takes it, leans forward and passes it to Manami. Izuku watches as Manami takes it with a gloved hand and a bright smile on her face before leaning forward herself and handing it to Sasaki. *They’ve practiced this*, Izuku realizes as he watches Sasaki roll down the window just a crack and drop the wire out, onto the road rushing by underneath them. It doesn’t make sense, because Izuku knows that the lieutenants didn’t know anything about this plan until recently.

“Give it up, Shinsou,” Sasaki says, and Izuku can hear the threat in her voice. He glances over to Shinsou, and he can see that Shinsou hears the same thing. Shinsou looks at Izuku, meeting his eyes, and Izuku nods his head just the tiniest bit. Shinsou untucks the front of his shirt and starts to fiddle with it, pulling the wire out.

“You don’t seem all that surprised,” Manami remarks from where she’s watching from the middle of the car. Her pupils are normal, and judging by the fact that she’s wearing gloves, Izuku thinks it’s intentional.

“I-I should have seen it earlier,” Izuku answers. He feels a wave of regret, thick and heavy, move through him, and briefly, he wonders if he should try to reset and turn back time, maybe get far enough back that he can fix this.

“We’re here,” Miura says, and Izuku jerks his head up sharply to look out the front window of the car. It doesn’t feel like it’s been that long, but Izuku remembers that he’d lost a disturbing amount of time to the after effects of Heaven.

What Izuku sees out the front window of the car is a nondescript part of the city’s outskirts, something that he’d never think about twice if he wasn’t desperately scanning it to try and figure out where, exactly, *here* is. There’s a number of low, squat buildings made of concrete and steel, but none of them seem to stand out any more than the rest. They seem normal, for all intents and purposes.

“Kaz,” Manami says, her voice quiet, and Fury jerks to attention beside Izuku before his gaze slides over to look at Izuku.

“Give me your hands,” Fury orders, and Izuku’s first instinct is to say no, to pull away from Fury and stop him, but Izuku knows better. He knows that when he’s in the throes of Fury’s quirk, he wouldn’t be able to stop him, anyway. Izuku holds out his hands, and he’s almost grateful when Fury slides a pair of slick metal handcuffs out of his pockets and clasps them over Izuku’s wrist.

“Shinsou, you next,” Fury says, his fingers still resting on the fine bones of Izuku’s wrist. It’s

uncomfortable; the pads of his fingers are far warmer than Izuku's skin, and it makes Izuku feel uneasy. He resists the urge to squirm, but he can't help the little sigh of relief that leaves him as Fury pulls away.

"Give me your belt," Manami says, extending a gloved hand. Izuku doesn't bother to try and tell them that he can't get the belt while handcuffed--he knows as well as they do that he can. He hopes, as he unlatches the thick, leather belt from around his waist, that they'll forget about at least one of the places he has knives hidden on him. Maybe the arm guards or the knives he has strapped to the ankles of his boots. Izuku wishes that he had the razor teeth from the support department, right now.

"Thanks," Manami says brightly, a smile on her face as Izuku hands her the belt. She takes it, setting it in her lap before she tips her head to the side slightly. "You have knives in your sleeves too, right? Can you get those out too?"

Izuku nods, jerkily, but he feels cold anxiety in his gut. He twists his arms just right to slide the hilts of the knives out, but he has to kind of shake them out into his lap. He picks them up, hands angled awkwardly enough that he's a little afraid he'll cut himself by mistake as he's reaching out to hand them to Manami. She takes them with a nod.

"Manami," Fury says from Izuku's side. "He's being difficult," Fury says with a heavy sigh. "You think I should?"

"No," Sasaki says from the front, just as she opens the passenger side door. She turns back to look at them with a smile and narrowed eyes. "Shinsou, be a dear and behave for Kazuo, or we'll have no choice but to kill you," she says, and Izuku doesn't think it's a bluff. He feels his own eyes widen, feels his chest swell with fear as he looks over to Shinsou, but Shinsou's already holding his hands out.

Izuku watches as the handcuffs close over Shinsou's wrists, and he thinks, briefly, that he really should have known better.

Chapter End Notes

content warning: dissociation, threats, uhhhhh abuse

[discord!](#) [carrd!](#)

i hope u enjoyed!!! sorry I've been less consistent lately

28th (part 2)

Chapter Summary

last time: izuku and shinsou went to the raid on the 28th but its a TRAP
hahahahahahaha nobody saw that coming

Chapter Notes

SORRY IVE BEEN GONE FOR TEN YEARS I've been busy being a gamer /hj

im gonna try to update at least like once a week, maybe more often, who knows im just vibing and trying to organize my schedule for the summer lmao

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

It's cool, outside of the car, but not cold enough to sting Izuku's skin or burn his nose as he sucks in a breath. Izuku's hands, cuffed together in front of him, are shaking as Miura presses the lock button on the keys of the car. She doesn't look happy, not the way that Sasaki and Fury do. Manami looks happy, too, but she usually does, so Izuku isn't really sure how much that means.

"Follow me," Sasaki says, throwing a glance back over her shoulder at Izuku and Shinsou as she starts off towards one of the many nondescript buildings up ahead. Izuku kind of hopes that the heroes will be able to use the car sitting in the parking lot to figure out where the Gekkeiju are, but he isn't sure that's even possible, considering that he doesn't think they knew which car was the Gekkeiju's ahead of time. Izuku follows Sasaki, casting a glance back at Fury and Manami, who move to take up the rear like it's second nature for them.

"What are you doing with us?" Shinsou asks from beside Izuku, his voice loud and indignant. Izuku sees Fury's lips twitch down in a frown, and for a moment, Izuku thinks that he might reply, but instead, he leans forward and pops Shinsou on the back of the head with an open palm. Izuku can tell from the way Shinsou's head snaps forward and the way that he hisses his teeth that it's painful, but Shinsou doesn't seem to let that stop him as he freezes in place, turning to face Fury.

"Too scared to say anything?" Shinsou asks. "I always knew you were an asshole and a liar, but I didn't realize you'd be a pussy too," he sneers, stepping forward and getting in Fury's face, staring him down through the dark glass of the sunglasses. Izuku feels like he's watching a trainwreck; he can see it in his mind, can imagine Fury just tugging down the glasses and filling Shinsou's mind with pain.

"Shinsou," Izuku says softly, a warning. Shinsou doesn't even look at him.

"No," Shinsou says. "I'm not going to just sit here and let them take us," he says, and then he's raising a knee to strike Fury in the crotch. Izuku hears Fury let out a choked noise as he leans forward, hands going to grab his crotch. Shinsou grins, a triumphant look on his face for a few seconds, before he's going pale and dropping to his knees, one hand over his mouth and his eyes going wide. Izuku blinks, stepping forward to help him or *something*, but he stops when he hears

Sasaki giggle.

“I mean, really,” she says, waving a hand. “Did you think that would work?” She laughs as Shinsou moves his hand, retching onto the ground. Izuku looks away with a grimace as the smell of sour acid fills the air.

“Gross,” Manami says, and Izuku would agree but he’s more worried about Shinsou at this point, who’s panting and gasping for air as he gags over and over again. Izuku doesn’t want to watch, doesn’t think Shinsou would like to be seen like this anyway, but it feels wrong not to do anything, so he moves forward, putting himself between Shinsou and Sasaki.

“H-He’s sorry,” Izuku says. “And he won’t--he won’t do it again,” he adds, glancing down to see Shinsou stare at him with furrowed brows as he wipes his mouth off with the back of his hand.

“Oh, really?” Sasaki asks, tipping her head to the side slightly. Izuku swallows, nodding, and he sees Shinsou nod hesitantly beside Izuku. He doesn’t say anything, but it seems to have satisfied Sasaki, because he’s not puking anymore.

“Fucking brat,” Fury curses, and Izuku winces when Fury kicks Shinsou in the side of one of his legs. Shinsou hisses, but he doesn’t say anything, just glares up at Fury with a defiant look on his face. Izuku feels uneasy, feels like Shinsou is going to make this worse for them, and he hates himself for blaming Shinsou, even in this small way.

“We need to keep going,” Miura says, and her face is carefully blank where she stands off to the side. “We’re far more likely to have our location discovered if we’re out here.” Izuku swallows. *So the heroes don’t have this location, at least not that the Gekkeiju know.*

“Fine,” Fury says, reaching down and grabbing Shinsou’s bicep with what looks like a painfully tight grip. He yanks Shinsou to his feet, then practically drags the boy behind him as he starts to walk again. Izuku swallows, following after Fury and letting Manami take up the rear. He knows better than to try and hang back, especially after what just happened.

It quickly becomes clear which building they’re headed towards. It’s a single story, square building made out of grey concrete with windows covered in aluminum foil and a sign that says “foreclosed” in all caps outside of the door, which is barred with a heavy-looking padlock. Izuku swallows. He’s not sure if it’s the type of building that the heroes would check first, or if they’d check the buildings that look larger, that look more well used. That’s if they find the area at all.

“Key,” Sasaki says, holding out a hand, and Miura nods. Izuku watches, waiting for Miura to reach into a pocket or something, but she doesn’t. Izuku’s confused for a moment before he sees a key float down from somewhere on top of the building next door, which is the tallest in the area. *It’d be hard even for me to get up there*, Izuku thinks as he cranes his neck back to look up at the adjoining building. As he watches Sasaki slide the key into the lock, he wonders if they’re connected, somehow.

Sasaki opens the door, holding it open as Miura steps inside. Izuku shifts uneasily as Fury drags Shinsou inside. He’s hesitant to go inside the building, which looks to be pitch black, but when Sasaki looks up at him, meeting his eyes with a grin and a jerk of her head towards the doorway, he knows he doesn’t really have much of a choice.

Izuku steps into the building, through the dark doorway. The first thing he notices is the smell; it’s musty and damp, like the building hasn’t been used in a long time. Izuku thinks that it’s odd, that if they’ve been preparing for something big, that there should be lights in here, that the building should *seem* used. He feels a shiver run up his spine as he hears the door shut behind him as

Manami and Sasaki step into the step, the only light coming from the bright green glow of Sasaki's eyes.

Izuku's confusion only grows when the building fills with a dull violet light. Izuku watches with wide eyes as a huge square panel on the floor, easily twenty feet in length, starts to glow. When it starts to lift off of the ground like it's weightless, sliding to the side, Izuku realizes that it's Miura's quirk; this whole base must have been built relying on her power. Izuku feels his heart sink in his chest. There's just no way that the heroes would be able to get in that way; the lead panel is at least a foot thick, too. As the light fades and the panel stops moving, Izuku finds himself missing the glow.

As he thinks that, though, the yellow light of a flashlight flickers to life. Izuku blinks, his eyes adjusting to the light as he processes that Manami is holding a flashlight up, pointing it at the stairs leading down into a dark tunnel below.

"Let's go!" she says, happily, and Izuku swallows. He can see the dark, shadowed forms of Fury and Shinsou, still linked by Fury's grip on Shinsou's arm, start to move towards the stairs.

"I'm going to trip if you keep holding me like that," Shinsou says, his voice rough. Izuku wonders if Fury's going to hurt him for a second as the man freezes in place, but he seems to consider for a moment before he releases Shinsou. Shinsou doesn't move to run, though, and Izuku gets the sense that he's figured out it's not necessarily a good idea.

"Down you go," Manami says cheerfully, and Izuku flinches when he feels her hand come down gently on his shoulder. It's not a painful grip, not in the slightest, but Izuku wasn't prepared for it. Manami doesn't even seem to notice his reaction, and Izuku can't help but feel a little grateful for it. He knows that it's something Fury might punish him for.

Izuku goes down the stairs like a blind man. The light from the flashlight really isn't enough, not with his shadow stretching out in front of him and a seemingly endless darkness up ahead. He has to go slow, placing each step carefully to try not to fall. He can hear the other following behind him, moving far more confidently than Izuku is, and it certainly isn't helping his anxiety. He swallows, picking up his pace and praying that the stairs are the same size each time.

He almost trips when the stairs end, the staircase bottoming out in what seems to be a long, dark tunnel. There's only a couple of moments of darkness before he sees Manami's flashlight beam lighting up the hallway, which looks to be made of smooth, dark stone. It's unnerving; it doesn't look like something that's in the middle of a city. He didn't hear anything that could be Miura closing the entrance, and for a minute he's hopeful that she might have forgot, but then he remembers that she's perfectly capable of closing it silently, and his spark of hope fades away.

"We haven't been here in *forever*," Manami says, her voice wondering. It echoes slightly against the walls of the tunnel, making Izuku wonder what on earth this place is made of. It looks almost like natural stone, but it's far too smooth and well-shaped.

"It's been about three years," Miura answers. She doesn't sound as happy to be here as Manami does. "I was under the impression we wouldn't be coming back."

Sasaki chuckles. "Aw, Sumire, I wouldn't let something as nice as this go to waste," she says, almost cooing. "Plus, we'll get to relive all of our old memories together!"

"It doesn't look like it's changed much, that's for sure," Fury says, and Izuku can hear the grin in his voice. "It's clean, though."

“Oh, I’ve had people tidying it up,” Sasaki says casually. Izuku wonders what, exactly, this place is. He wonders what it means to the Gekkeiju, because it seems to be far more important than he’d initially thought.

“Who?” Miura asks, and there’s a clipped edge to her voice, like she doesn’t want anyone here. Izuku hears Sasaki sigh, and he can imagine her shaking her head.

“Don’t worry, Sumire, you’ll see them in a moment.” She sounds like a mother scolding a child, and Izuku is suddenly reminded that Sasaki practically raised the lieutenants, that they basically *are* her children.

They seem to be done with the conversation, because nobody says anything else as they continue down the hallway, their footsteps echoing through the space. Izuku can see something up ahead, maybe a wall or a door. A door seems more likely, but the smooth, flat surface that the light is reflecting off of looks an awful lot more like a wall.

“Sumire,” Sasaki says, her voice low and smooth, and Miura moves forward without any protest, sliding up to the front of the group. She doesn’t even raise a hand; the panel just starts to glow a faint purple, and then it’s moving, sliding up into the ceiling above. Izuku watches with awe as it rises up to reveal a large room lit with a warm orange light, almost like it’s lit with candles. Izuku can’t see much beside the floor, which is tiled in a black and white checkerboard pattern, like an old school diner, and the far wall, which seems to be made of shiny polish stone, the same deep black as the tunnel they’d just walked through.

“In you go,” Fury grunts, and Izuku winces in sympathy as Fury shoves Shinsou into the room. Shinsou bristles, turning back to glare at Fury, but he freezes as his eyes catch on something Izuku can’t see. Izuku watches as he slides into a fighting stance, moving not so subtly. Before Izuku has a chance to process, Fury reaches back and grabs his arm, dragging him into the room.

The room is huge; Izuku can’t possibly imagine the point of it for how large it is. Its floor is entirely made of those black and white tiles, and to one side of the room, there’s a collection of black leather couches around a low coffee table. Izuku can see a black shag rug under the couches, and there’s a TV mounted to the wall, but it’s turned off. The rest of the room is eerily empty. On the side opposite the couches, there are four doors, all identical and very clearly made of solid lead. The entire room is lit by lights that hang from the ceiling, dangling so low that Izuku is sure Sasaki’s head would hit them if she walked under. They seem to be made of wrought iron, and the light they cast is too red to not be intentional.

None of that is what makes Izuku’s breath catch in his throat. It’s not the way that there are *drains* in the floor, either, not the way that he hears the lead panel hitting the floor behind them as the rest of the Gekkeiju move into the room. It’s not the way that Fury’s hand is still holding his arm too firmly to be comfortable.

No, what makes Izuku pause, what makes his mouth go dry and his throat constrict is the group of three familiar faces standing, watching Izuku and Shinsou enter the room with a smile. It’s the way that Sasaki moves forward with a wide smile on her face, pulling one of the group into a tight hug. It’s the way that the Lady of the Void makes eye contact with Izuku while she hugs Sasaki, a sly grin on her face.

“It’s been too long, Maiko,” Void says. Threadbare, beside her, takes a few steps forward. Fury meets him, moving forward to give his hand a firm shake.

“Nice to finally meet you in person,” Fury says casually. Izuku swallows. His eyes move to Manami as she skips forward to July, waving excitedly but keeping her hands back. July smiles

back, and Izuku feels his heart sink even further in his chest.

He turns to Miura, because there's no way that she'd known these people when they met them with Haruta. Izuku would know--he can read Miura at this point, well enough to recognize when she's surprised. She doesn't look surprised right now. If anything, she looks resigned. Her face is sorrowful, her mouth drawn in a tight line. When Izuku meets her gaze, she mouths two words, and even though there's no sound, Izuku knows exactly what she's saying.

"I'm sorry," Miura mouths, and Izuku thinks he might cry.

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The next hour or so passes in a blur. Izuku doesn't lose consciousness or go into his head or anything like that, but the villains mostly whisper to one another or communicate with gestures and sinister looks, and Izuku has no idea what it means. He and Shinsou don't say anything; Izuku because he knows it wouldn't help anything, and Shinsou probably because the one time he opens his mouth to try, Fury sets a heavy hand down on his shoulder.

They're led through one of the doors on the side of the room without furniture, the one closest to the wall they came in through. Miura doesn't have to open it; there's a handle on this door, even though it's very clearly lead. Izuku figures that it would probably be kind of inconvenient for the others in the base to need Miura to open and shut any door, so it makes sense. The hallways are well-lit with the same dull orange lantern-like lights as the main room, and the floor is the exact same checkerboard pattern. It makes Izuku think of old organized crime movies, and he realizes that the Gekkeiju has always kind of had that aesthetic. *Sasaki lived in America, for a while*, Izuku thinks. *Maybe she took inspiration from their movies and TV shows.*

The hallway is long and plain, and there is only one door at the very end of the hall, at least that Izuku can see. It's unnerving; why is the hallway so long, if there aren't any rooms attached to it? Izuku doesn't like it, but it doesn't mean that there's anything he can do about it as he and Shinsou are led to the door. The entire group of villains are behind them except for Fury, who walks alongside them, and Void, who leads the way.

The door opens easily, without a key or anything, and that's probably why it catches Izuku off guard when he sees what are very clearly rows of cells, with thick metal bars and heavy locks on the doors. Izuku swallows heavily as they're led into the room, and he pretends that he doesn't notice Fury smiling out of the corner of his eye.

"Here we are," Void says, a huff in her voice. "Are we putting them in together, or in separate cells?" she asks, turning to Fury with a hand on her hip. Izuku eyes the cells, taking in the fact that each of them seem to have some kind of primitive toilet and a sink, but not much else. There aren't even beds, and the floor is solid concrete aside from drains in the center of each small room.

"Together, for now," Fury says, glancing back over his shoulder to Sasaki like he's confirming. Izuku can't see her response, but it seems to be an affirmative, because Fury doesn't correct himself as Void moves forward and unlocks the cell closest to the door.

"Shinsou," Threadbare says, his voice low and rough like he hasn't spoken in a while. "Come 'ere," he orders, and Izuku swallows uneasily as Shinsou turns, his brows furrowing and his lips twitching into a scowl. He opens his mouth like he's about to reply, but before he can, Threadbare smoothly pulls a handgun out from a pocket within his coat, and he points it at Shinsou.

"Wasn't a question," Threadbare drawls, leaning his head back and regarding Shinsou like he's a particularly interesting piece of trash. "Don't speak to me unless I tell you to." Shinsou stares back

at him, eyes wide, and Izuku thinks for a terrible moment that Shinsou's not going to listen, that he's going to get killed here, where Izuku wouldn't even know how to reset to fix it, but Shinsou steps forward, moves closer to Threadbare. Izuku doesn't want to watch as Threadbare pulls out a thick piece of cloth from his pocket, but he can't tear his eyes away. Izuku watches as Threadbare puts the gun back in its hidden holster, a smirk on his face as he fixes the gag round Shinsou's mouth.

"There, that wasn't so bad, was it?" he asks, chuckling. Threadbare turns to Izuku, next, and Izuku knows to step forward even before Threadbare says, "You next."

Izuku is expecting a gag, so when Threadbare pulls out a piece of cloth, he isn't shocked. He's not expecting when Threadbare wraps it around his eyes, instead, and the suffocating darkness immediately makes Izuku's heart race in his chest. Even though this room is much warmer, even though Izuku can still see a line of light at the bottom of his vision and can hear the sounds of the other people in the room, it reminds Izuku viscerally of the morgue. Izuku swallows, heavily, but he doesn't say anything, doesn't move. He doesn't want to provoke them, doesn't want to give any of them a reason to take any more of his senses away.

Izuku hears the sound of something metal knocking against more metal, and then a huff of breath. Izuku holds his arms tight to himself, wishing that his handcuffed hands would let him hug his chest. He can't, though, so he settles for pressing his arms to his sides.

"Alright, get in there," Void says, and Izuku feels a momentary rush of panic, not knowing where to go, before he feels body heat next to him. *Shinsou*, he realizes after a moment. The other boy isn't touching him, probably because he can't with his hands restrained, but it's enough to guide Izuku into the cell, or at least Izuku *assumes* that's where they're going. It's not a long distance, and shortly after Shinsou stops moving, Izuku hears the sound of metal hitting metal again.

"Sit," Void orders, and Izuku pauses for just a moment before he complies. He can hear Shinsou plopping onto the ground behind him, and the sounds of someone moving closer. Izuku flinches back when he feels someone roughly grab his wrist, dragging him to his left. Izuku hears something click. A *zip tie*, he realizes as the person moves away from him and he tugs at his arms. They're locked in place, the chain connecting the two cuffs attached to something, probably one of the metal bars separating this cell from the next. Izuku wishes that he knew for sure, but with his hands like this, he can't get the blindfold off. He hears another series of clicks, another zip tie tightened, and Izuku knows that Shinsou is in the same position of him.

"Be good in there," Fury says, and there's amusement in his voice. "We'll be back for you in a little bit," he says, and Izuku would almost rather they were left in here to rot. He hears the sound of footsteps moving away, and he doesn't relax until there's a few minutes without any movement aside from Shinsou beside him.

"Fuck," Izuku says, quietly. He doesn't normally swear much, just because he doesn't think that way naturally, but he thinks that this situation really, *really* calls for cursing. Shinsou can't reply, of course, but Izuku hears him grunt, a muffled noise that makes Izuku's heart hurt. Izuku twists his arms, trying to see if he can yank them up to eye level to at least pull at the blindfold, but something stops him from moving them up, something crossing the bar he's attached too. Izuku huffs out a breath, lowering his head and scrabbling towards his face. He can't quite get his torso bent over enough for him to reach his head down without knocking it on the bars, and he can't pull his hands up any higher.

Izuku hisses in frustration. "I can't get the blindfold off," he says, knowing that Shinsou can hear him even if he can't reply. Shinsou hums, something that sounds like agreement, and Izuku figures

that he's not having any more luck with the gag.

They sit there for a long time, longer than Izuku knows. It's not like the morgue; Shinsou shuffles around every now and then or grunts or sighs loudly, something to give Izuku a sign that he's not alone. Izuku can see a thin line of light, too, and if he angles his head just right, he can see a sliver of cool grey that he thinks is the floor. It's too low for his eyes to focus on it properly without his eyes hurting from the strain, but it's still comforting in a strange way.

Izuku talks, while they're down there. It's not a coherent conversation, nothing like that. He just *talks*, because he knows that it's frustrating and boring and scary to be here, and Shinsou can't talk, can't say anything, so Izuku does it for him. He tells him about people he's saved, as Ace, tells him about the way the sunrise looks over the bridge on the far side of town, tells him stories about Mouse and Eri that Izuku is pretty sure he's told him before. It's okay, though, because when Shinsou makes noises in reply, they're not noises of protest.

They're down there long past the point where Izuku's mouth has gone dry, where his head aches from thirst and his stomach feels cold and empty. He thinks it's been a few hours, at least; his legs and butt hurt from sitting on the hard, cold ground. He thinks, maybe, that he should start trying harder to get the blindfold off, at least so that he can get Shinsou's gag off--it seems like it'd make the thirst worse. Izuku's come to realize that, maybe, the Gekkeiju didn't gag Shinsou because of his quirk. With Izuku blindfolded and Shinsou unable to speak, they can't really do much. Izuku can't see any nonverbal signals Shinsou makes, and Shinsou can't explain what's going on to compensate for Izuku's lack of vision. It makes it difficult to do much more than sit there.

It's when Izuku is starting to wonder if they're just going to leave them there that he hears the sound of the door opening, hears the sound of shoes on the concrete floor of the room. *The dungeon*, he thinks to himself, half joking and half serious. He listens, determines that whoever is walking is fairly heavy, definitely not July or Manami. He's not sure more than that, although, it does sound like the person is wearing sneakers and not dress shoes.

When Izuku hears the door to the cell opening, he can't hold himself back. He wiggles against his restraints, angling himself towards the sound of the person walking in.

"W-Who's there?" Izuku asks, his mouth dry and his voice rough from talking to Shinsou for so long, trying to keep them both sane. Izuku feels warm hands touch his face, and he flinches back a tiny bit before he realizes that they're pulling the blindfold *off*.

"It's just me," Sasaki says, her smile warm and the edges of her acid-green eyes crinkled up as she pulls the blindfold off, depositing it on the ground. "Sorry that it took so long." She sounds strangely serious, like she's actually apologetic that they've been locked in here.

"What's--" Izuku starts, but then he shuts his mouth. He doesn't want to push it, especially not when he sees Sasaki pulling a pair of keys out of her pocket.

"Do you want to be able to move around?" she asks, tipping her head to the side slightly. She's so close to Izuku's face that he can smell her perfume, something that smells like oranges and sugar. She's wearing casual clothes, too, which Izuku's never seen before--a t-shirt and a pair of jeans with sneakers.

"Y-Yes please," Izuku says, and Sasaki nods, looking over to Shinsou.

"After I leave, I'll let you keep the key, so you can get him out and take his gag off," Sasaki says. Shinsou's looking at her with narrowed lavender eyes. The gag in his mouth looks damp, and the corners of his mouth are red and angry where the fabric must be digging in.

“T-Thank you,” Izuku says, because he doesn’t want to push it. Sasaki smiles, the corners of her mouth creeping up even closer to her eyes.

“Of course,” she purrs. She reaches over to Izuku’s hands, slipping the key into a small hole in the handcuffs. “You’ll have to do something for me,” she says, her voice dropping to something dangerous. Izuku suddenly feels less safe than he had with the blindfold over his eyes, because he can see the predatory look on her face.

“What?” he asks, his voice a tiny squeak. Sasaki chuckles, lightly until her breath.

“Don’t worry,” she says. “It’s better than dying of thirst, isn’t it?” Her eyes move over, to a sink that Izuku can now see at the side of the room. “That water is clean, and there’s a toilet. I’ll even give you some soap and cups, so you can wash your hands and drink properly. That’s if you behave well enough, of course.”

Izuku swallows. He glances over to Shinsou, who’s staring at him with wide eyes. Shinsou seems to think for a moment, before he nods, the motion small. Izuku gets the message. *If it means we’re uncuffed, there’s a chance we’ll be able to escape.*

“Okay,” Izuku says, his voice more steady than he feels. “What do--what do I have to do?” He watches Sasaki grin wider, her eyes crinkling, and he feels sick.

“Just hold still,” she says, reaching up and cupping her hands around his cheeks. Izuku stares, frozen, as she moves forward, pressing their foreheads together and looking into his eyes with a gaze so bright that it hurts.

“This is my first time doing this,” she says. “So sorry if it’s a little... off.”

Izuku feels a tug in the back of his head, somewhere inside his brain, and then the cell fades away.

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Izuku recognizes, vaguely, that something is wrong, but the sensation slips away far too quickly for him to think about it very much.

There’s a moment where he’s in between himself and someone else, where he’s a phantom of a person, existing on the edge of real and fake, and then he knows what’s happening. As his existence starts to bleed into Sasaki’s, as he starts to feel himself becoming someone else, he recognizes it; he’s going into her memories. Except, it’s not like before, when he was just in little Maiko’s body; he *is* Maiko, and as everything rematerializes around him, he’s not Izuku at all for very long.

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Maiko thinks that this place is perfect.

The basement is absolutely atrocious. The floor is covered in this absolutely awful black and white checked linoleum, completely covered in a thin layer of grime. The white parts are stained ivory yellow, and there’s cracks throughout the ground. The walls are awful, too. There’s wallpaper, a gross maroon color covering the walls, and it’s peeling in places to reveal a thick layer of wallpaper paste behind them. The entire place smells of stale alcohol and weed, and if Maiko focuses hard enough, like bodily fluids (and not just blood). It’s kind of disgusting, to be honest, but that’s to be expected considering it used to be a nightclub, the kind where the owners didn’t pay rent or taxes or follow any laws. Maiko supposes that’s why she was able to get her hands on the place.

“Maiko?” Manami says from behind her, where she’s clutching onto Maiko’s skirt with hands wrapped in her favorite mittens. Maiko reaches back, giving her a comforting squeeze on the shoulder.

“It’s okay,” she says, smiling. “I know it doesn’t look like much now, but we’ll get it fixed up. You and Sumire and Kazuo can have your own rooms, if you want.”

“We’ll sleep in the same room,” Kazuo says in all of his thirteen-year-old confidence. “We’ve always slept together. We take shifts.” He sounds proud of himself, and Maiko looks over to him, where he’s standing with Sumire’s hand in his. Sumire’s looking around the room carefully, a violet glint in her eyes.

“Sumire, do you sense something?” Maiko asks, carefully. Sumire’s eyes move over to her, staring at her for a moment before answering.

“There’s a lot of lead around here,” Sumire says, her voice still quiet, even though Maiko’s told her a hundred times that it’s okay for her to talk, that she can speak up if she wants.

“Bullets?” Maiko asks, glancing around at the walls. It’s pretty clear that there’s been some fights here, but Maiko isn’t sure if there’d be bullets stuck in the wall like that. She’s pretty sure they’re stone, behind the paste and wallpaper.

“And natural,” Sumire says. “Like, um, the rock.” Sumire glances down at the ground. “I can’t move that v-very well,” she says. “Sorry.”

“You should be able to,” Kazuo says, pouting. The eyepatch over his bad eye and the sunglasses resting on his nose make it look a little less intimidating than it might be otherwise. “What the hell have you been training for?”

“It’s amazing that she can move it at all, Kazuo,” Maiko says, giving them both a warm smile. She feels Manami leaning into her side. “I’m not sure what kind of rock would be around here, Sumire. We can find out together, while we’re living here.” She speaks slowly, carefully. Sumire glances over at Kazuo anyway.

“I think we’d be okay on our own,” Sumire says. Despite Kazuo talking a big game, Maiko can tell that Sumire is the actual leader of the little trio. Kazuo seems to consider what Sumire said for a bit, his lips twisting into a frown.

“But I don’t want to,” Kazuo says. “I mean, c’mon. Maiko said she’d give us food, for free. We wouldn’t have to work.” He sounds like he might start yelling at her again, if this doesn’t go right, and Maiko really wants to avoid that, so she cuts in.

“How about we give it a try?” Maiko says, softly, coaxingly. “You three can help me fix this place and the rest of the tunnels up, and after a week or so, if you’re not happy with it, you’re welcome to leave.” Maiko smiles, looking down at Manami who stares up at her with huge, orange-bright eyes. “I don’t want to force you to do anything.”

Sumire seems to consider for a moment. “Okay,” Sumire says, her voice quiet. “But we aren’t going to stay if you hurt us. And you’re not allowed to use Kazuo’s quirk unless he tells you you can.”

“Of course,” Maiko says, and she feels a swell of sympathy in her chest. “I would never.”

content warning: uhhhhhhhhh torture implied, imprisonment, implied child abuse

[discord!](#) [carrd!](#)

besties i hope u enjoyed this :)

cells

Chapter Summary

last time: izuku is in a cell with shinsou and sasaki gave him a memory from when she and the lieutenants were younger

Chapter Notes

HI GAMERS sorry for dropping off the face of the earth LMAO i needed a break after being all blnt all the time for like. the entire first 5 months of the year

the break was really needed but im back now!! i plan on trying to ease back into writing so idk how often updates will be for now but im gonna TRY for every 2-3 days :D

also: please don't leave criticism on things that would take large (i.e. multi chapter) edits to fix. i know this story is too convoluted and dramatic. that's the kind of thing that takes MONTHS of editing to really fix. a lot of why i needed a break is that getting a lot of negative feedback is really really demotivating to me. i kinda felt like this story was so shitty that there was no point in continuing it. i know the story has issues. it's essentially a first draft--yall get each chapter as it's written. ofc there are going to be pacing/overall plot/mood issues. don't point out things i couldn't reasonably fix in an hour!

with that said, i hope you enjoy!!!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Blinking back into the real world feels like rising out of cold water into lukewarm air. Izuku blinks, gasping and taking in air as quickly as he can. He relishes in the fact that it's *his* body, that he's breathing into his own lungs--it didn't feel strange at the time, but in hindsight, spending even those few moments living Sasaki's memories is disorienting. It feels *wrong*, like he wasn't meant to see that.

"I'll unlock your cuffs," Sasaki says, and there's a shaky undertone to her voice. She's crouched in front of Izuku, and when she moves her hands to twist the key in Izuku's handcuffs, he can see that she's trembling slightly. It's like it'd taken a lot out of her, to give him that memory, but it's still less than last time, where she'd used trigger. *It felt different, too*, Izuku thinks to himself as Sasaki pulls away, wiping sweat off of her brow with the back of a hand.

"I'll have someone bring soap by later," she says, and then she's moving out of the cell, opening the door and shutting it behind her. *It wasn't even locked*, Izuku realizes, as she locks it before she disappears down the hallway.

Izuku hears a grunt beside him, and he's suddenly reminded of Shinsou. The other boy jerks at his cuffs, and they rattle where they're connected to the bars of the cell. Izuku blinks at him for a

moment before he moves forward, grabbing the key that Sasaki's left in the lock of his handcuffs and pulling it out. It's a flimsy thing, just a small piece of metal, and it seems underwhelming for what it is. Izuku slips it into the lock of Shinsou's handcuffs and twists, and in the next moment, Shinsou is ripping his hands free and yanking at the gag in his mouth.

"Fuck," Shinsou spits, his voice hoarse. Izuku watches as he works his mouth, his jaw clicking in a way that Izuku is sure is painful.

"I'll--I'll get you some water," Izuku says, stumbling to his feet and moving to the little sink in the corner before he realizes that Sasaki has yet to give him the cups she'd mentioned. He glances back at Shinsou, watches the boy's eyes narrow at him.

"What did she do to you?" Shinsou asks, and Izuku blinks. It takes him a moment to realize that it wouldn't have been visible, wouldn't have been something that Shinsou was able to see. Izuku swallows.

"She--she made me live through one of her memories," Izuku says, watching as Shinsou pulls himself to his feet, moving over to the sink. Izuku steps out of the way, watching as Shinsou turns it on and cups his hands under the stream of water, bringing it to his mouth over and over again as he gulps down the water. Izuku swallows, suddenly aware of how dry his throat is.

"What memory?" Shinsou asks as he pulls back, his face wet with water, and Izuku's suddenly struck with the fact that this is the most Shinsou has spoken to him since Izuku told Aizawa about his parents. Izuku swallows.

"It was just--I don't know, it was weird," Izuku says. "I think it was when she first--when the Gekkeiju first got this place," he says. Izuku moves to the sink as Shinsou steps away, and Izuku copies Shinsou's movements from before, taking a handful of cool water and gulping it down. It feels like magic on his dry throat.

"Did you know this was a trap?" Shinsou asks. Izuku can tell from his tone of voice that he doesn't actually think Izuku knew, but he had to ask anyway. Izuku gets it, he thinks.

"No," Izuku says, swallowing the last traces of water in his mouth. "I had no idea."

--

Izuku sleeps for most of the time that passes before Sasaki comes back. He's not sure how long it is, exactly, but he's tired in a way that he's only ever been after something bad has happened. Not physical exhaustion, he doesn't think--this is something that sticks to the corners of his mind and resounds in his thoughts, that makes him feel sticky and gross inside.

Izuku sleeps, but it doesn't help much. When he jerks awake to Shinsou tugging at his sleeve, a desperate warning on his face, Izuku feels more tired than he had been when he'd fallen asleep what felt like moments ago. He still manages to pull himself out of his haze long enough to watch Sasaki walk to the front of their cell, a black dress swishing around her knees and a sly smile on her face.

"I brought gifts," she says, and she's sliding a slim cardboard box through the bars of the cell. Izuku doesn't move, but Shinsou scrambles forward. He's pulling stuff out of the box even before Sasaki turns to leave, silent except for the clicking of her shoes against the concrete ground. Izuku doesn't know whether to watch her or Shinsou. He doesn't have to decide once Sasaki is out of view.

“Soap,” Shinsou says, pulling out what looks like a plain bar of white soap. He sets it on the ground carefully. Next, he pulls out two paper cups, the kind that Izuku remembers there being at dentists offices; they’re made for just one use, normally, but Izuku knows they can make them last. They’re small, and Shinsou sets them on the floor of the room with great care. The next thing he pulls out is a roll of toilet paper, something Izuku hadn’t even thought of needing but is suddenly immensely grateful for. Izuku watches as Shinsou pulls one more item back, sitting back on his legs as he examines the granola bar in his hands, wrapped in colorful foil.

“There’s just this one,” Shinsou says. “Are they planning to starve us?” he mutters, and Izuku can tell he’s mostly talking to himself. Izuku wonders how much of that he’d been doing while Izuku slept.

“You can have it,” Izuku says, before he really plans to say anything at all. “I’m not hungry.” It’s true--he isn’t. He just feels a dull, heavy numbness, something that he isn’t entirely sure is all mental. Maybe Sasaki’s quirk has this effect, now, instead of making him bleed. Somewhere in Izuku’s mind, he knows that this should set off alarm bells for him, but he really isn’t sure why.

Shinsou eyes him like he doesn’t believe a word. “We’ll split it,” he says. “You look like shit.” Izuku wants to be a little offended at that, but he knows Shinsou is right.

“Took more out of me than I was expecting,” Izuku says, and he watches Shinsou squint at him.

“Has she always been able to do that?” he asks. Izuku swallows, watching as Shinsou’s fingers tear at the foil on the granola bar.

“Just once, but--but she was on trigger,” Izuku explains. Shinsou nods, his gaze moving down as he breaks the granola bar in half. It splits like it’s one of the soft ones, with little pieces of oats separating and pulling like they want to fall off. Izuku can smell chocolate as Shinsou passes him his half. It’s pathetically small.

“Did it feel the same?” Shinsou asks, and Izuku doesn’t get why he’s asking these questions. It doesn’t make any sense. Izuku takes a bite of his granola bar, and the sweet taste of honey and chocolate and sugar washes over his tongue. It doesn’t cut through all of the haze, but it certainly pushes some of it back.

“N-not really,” Izuku says. He swallows his mouthful, the gooey bits of sugar syrup sticking to his dry throat. He swallows again, trying to clear it from his mouth, and then his mind provides him with one thought, bright and glaring in front of him.

I should kill myself, he thinks, and it’s washing over him like a waves in the ocean, sending him tumbling around in saltwater, choking on seafoam. Izuku should have killed himself ages ago. He should have found a way, because with where they are right now, with how long it’s been (how long has it been? A few hours? A few days?) he doesn’t think he’d be lucky enough to reset back that far. He doesn’t think that he stands a chance, not really, but that isn’t the part that makes it so it’s not worth trying.

Izuku realizes, as he looks around the cell, that he doesn’t really have any good way to do himself in. There’s the bars of the cell, the cold concrete of the floor to bash his head in against or the sink to drown himself in, but he knows perfectly well that those aren’t *easy* or *quick*. Izuku knows better than anyone else how long it can take to die, how hard it can be to pull it off. He knows that, if he were to try any of the ways that are possible right now, that he’d be stopped.

Shinsou wouldn’t have to use his quirk. He could grab Izuku and pull him back, could hold him firm. It wouldn’t even have to be a particularly tight grip; even if Izuku got free just a little, a weak

bang of his head or getting himself half under the water wouldn't be enough, anyway. It's not like a knife to his wrist or a gunshot to the head; they're not *quick* enough. Izuku swallows as this hits him, as he realizes. He sees a similar look of realization, of understanding, pass over Shinsou's face, but Izuku also knows they're not thinking about the same thing and that makes it all the more concerning.

"It wasn't the same," Shinsou says. "I don't think it was the same, Midoriya." His voice sounds panicked, thick with something that Izuku doesn't quite understand. Izuku shakes his head.

"What do you--what do you mean?" Izuku asks, swallowing. It feels like there's a piece of the granola bar stuck in his throat, maybe an oat or a chunk of chocolate. Izuku wonders if it'd be enough to choke him.

"Sasaki, she--you said she was trying to get a quirk from All for One," Shinsou says, and Izuku can't really remember if he *said* that or if it was something that was just part of the reports at the meetings. Izuku swallows.

"Y-Yeah, she--she wanted to be able to take memories," Izuku says, and *oh*, he gets it. It feels like cold ice being dropped down the back of his shirt, leaving a trail of goosebumps on the sink covering his spine. Izuku reaches a hand up, presses it to his mouth. Shinsou's face is grim, and Izuku wishes he'd keep his mouth shut as he starts to speak.

"She already has it," Shinsou says, and Izuku really, really hopes that he's wrong.

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There's something awkward about the next hour or so. Izuku thinks that it's the dread permeating the air, filling the cell and making it feel heavy, oppressive. Izuku keeps going over it in his mind. What Sasaki had told him. How she would have gotten the quirk already.

"She--there's no way they'd have--how would she have gotten to--to All for One?" Izuku asks, not for the first time. He wipes the sweat off of his palms and onto his pants.

"I don't *know*," Shinsou hisses, his voice filled with frustration. "I told you, I don't have any fucking clue. But it--it's possible."

"She--it's probably just her quirk," Izuku says. "The one that she--that she started with," he says. His throat feels heavy when he swallows.

"I certainly hope so," Shinsou says. It's not the first time they've had this almost exact conversation, nearly word for word, but it's not like they have much else to talk about. Izuku's just glad that Shinsou's *talking* to him, even if they're ignoring the issues they had before all of this. It seems to minor, now that they're locked in a cell together with no way of knowing what's going to happen to them, no way of knowing exactly what had already happened to Izuku.

"When they got Kurogiri out," Izuku says. "Could they--there's no way," he says.

"It was a while back," Shinsou says. "They should have noticed if they got to All for One," he says. "I don't get it."

"It shouldn't be--it shouldn't be possible," Izuku says. "There's just no way." It's starting to be a lot less convincing.

"We shouldn't be worrying about this," Shinsou says. "It's not even that big of a deal if she has the quirk. We need to think about how we're getting out of here."

Izuku shakes his head. “No if--if she can get memories, she can--she can inflict *anything* , it’s--it’s going to kill us,” Izuku says, his voice getting higher pitched as he speaks. “It’s--it’s--”

“She can’t kill us,” Shinsou says, cutting Izuku off. “If she was going to, she already would have.” Izuku shivers. He’s not quite sure that’s right, but he can’t exactly tell Shinsou that he’s scared Sasaki already knows about his real quirk and is just waiting until she can steal the memory of death from him, until she can use him to kill.

“What does she want from us, then?” Izuku asks. He watches as Shinsou’s mouth presses into a thin line, and Izuku knows that there’s not really a good answer. No matter what Sasaki wants, this doesn’t end well for them.

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Sasaki doesn’t come back until what Izuku thinks is the next morning. He’s not entirely sure, but he thinks that it’s morning because he wakes up on his own and he’s got that biting hunger in his stomach that he usually gets before breakfast. He kind of hopes that it *is* morning, and that they’ve only been here one night, but he’s a little too hungry for it to have been only that long. Either way, he’s not quite *happy* to see Sasaki, but he thinks that it’s better than being left here to rot indefinitely. She’s wearing something different from before, a turtleneck and jeans, so he thinks that it’s at least a different day from before. Or she’s messing with them. Either is possible, really.

Shinsou’s awake too, in the corner of the cell. He’s been sitting with his knees drawn up to his chest and a faraway look in his eyes for a while now, and Izuku’s not sure if he should try to talk to him or if that would make things worse. He’s left Shinsou alone, for the most part. Izuku gets it. Sometimes, when things are difficult, it’s like his brain tries to take him away from it all, and he can only imagine that’s what Shinsou is doing, too.

When Sasaki’s footsteps fill the space, Izuku can see Shinsou jerking upright, like he’s waking up from sleep. Izuku feels a bolt of adrenaline pass through him, too, as he turns to watch Sasaki step in front of the cell. She’s got a thin smile on her face and a backpack hanging off of one shoulder. Izuku swallows. He hopes that there are more “gifts” in the backpack and not something more sinister.

“Good morning,” Sasaki says, and Izuku feels a small spike of relief at the fact that his sense of time is apparently correct. “How’d you sleep?” She tilts her head to the side slightly, and Izuku thinks that she’s mocking them. There’s no way she’d actually expect them to be well rested.

She doesn’t seem to be waiting for a reply, though, because she moves closer to the bars of the cell, shrugging the backpack off of her shoulder as she moves to sit on the concrete floor. Izuku wonders if getting closer to her would make her happy, if it’d have the same effect as being polite to her, but he doesn’t dare do so without being told. Instead, he watches as she unzips the backpack, pulling out two more of the granola bars from earlier. Izuku feels his mouth water at the sight.

“You’re probably hungry,” she says, a slight smile on her face as she sets the granola bars in her lap. “We don’t want you getting *too* comfortable, of course, but I’d be willing to give you these in exchange for something else.” There’s a glint to the acid-green of her eyes that Izuku doesn’t like, but he swallows down his fear and asks anyway.

“I-In exchange for what?” Izuku asks. His voice is rough in the way that it normally would be after a night of patrolling, the kind of hoarse that you get from hours of not talking. Sasaki’s eyes narrow as she grins.

“Same as before,” Sasaki says. “I have a memory that I think you’ll find particularly compelling.”

She lets out a small breath that might be a laugh. Izuku isn't sure.

"Okay," Izuku says, his eyes moving to the granola bars in Sasaki's lap. "And we--we get both of them?" he asks, just to be sure. Sasaki nods.

"Of course," she purrs. "Come a little closer, Midoriya." Izuku swallows. He can feel Shinsou's gaze on him from the other end of the cell, but he doesn't let that stop him from scooting forward, moving towards Sasaki. He has to force himself not to flinch when she reaches for him through the bars of the cell, her hand reaching out and her fingers resting on the underside of Izuku's chin. Izuku's sure she can feel it when he swallows.

"Do you have to touch him to use it?" Shinsou asks from behind Izuku, his voice dry. Izuku watches Sasaki quirk up one eyebrow.

"So you've figured it out already," she says, her eyes glued on Izuku, a hint of amusement in her voice. "I have to say, I'm impressed." Izuku wishes she'd either let him go or get it over with already, but he has a feeling that if he said as much, there'd be consequences. There's a brief moment where Izuku thinks that it might count as a reply to Shinsou's question, but it doesn't seem to work, because he hears a frustrated hiss from Shinsou behind him as Sasaki's smile widens.

"You know, we had a little girl with a quirk a lot like his," Sasaki says to Izuku, jerking her head back to indicate that she's talking about Shinsou. "I've gotten quite used to this sort of thing." Izuku swallows. *She has to know that I'm the one who took Mouse*, he thinks. Izuku hopes that Sasaki is only bringing it up to say that she won't be affected by Shinsou's quirk and not any other reason.

Izuku doesn't really get a chance to wonder, though. This time, the sensation of the world pulling away and his brain melding into something from years ago is familiar. He knows what's happening, but he doesn't have the chance to feel afraid, let alone to try and resist.

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The wind that brushes against Maiko's skin is warm. It feels like a paintbrush, dusting over the fine hairs on her arms, making her body break out in goosebumps despite the warmth. She's uneasy, despite Hotaru at her side.

"Do you think that we're going to learn how to farm?" Hotaru asks, a grin on her face and her golden eyes warm. They're the same color as the stalks of wheat that rustle and move around them, stretching out all the way to the edges of the field. Surrounding the plot of farmland is a forest, thick and green, and Maiko longs for the shade. It's only just after sunrise, and the heat is already suffocating.

"I hope not," Maiko replies, her voice a murmur. They both know that's not what they're here for, but Hotaru's little joke still manages to soothe something in Maiko's chest. She'll be okay, as long as her sister is here.

When their manager turns away from where she's off talking to their mother and Mr. Rivera, Maiko has a sinking feeling that she knows what today is going to be about. Clutched in their manager's hand is a familiar slim, silver stopwatch.

"Girls," she says, reaching up her free hand to brush a strand of her grey hair out of her face and tuck it behind her ear. "We're doing search and rescue exercises again today." Her hair is up in a tight bun, as it always is, and she's wearing khaki shorts and a loose cotton t-shirt. Maiko's jealous. Nothing about her hero uniform is *loose*, and it's certainly not anything that resembles

comfortable.

“Really?” Hotaru asks, an easy smile on her face as she shifts to the side, resting one hand on her hip and tilting her head slightly. “We’ve done so much of that lately. I really think we’d be better off with something else.” The way she says it, confident and easy, makes it sound like she’s an authority, like she should be listened to. Maiko wishes she could do that, but she wishes even more that there was any chance of the manager listening.

“You know that your times aren’t up to par yet,” the manager says, clicking her tongue and shaking her head. It almost sounds like she’s actually apologetic. “You *both* need to be under ten minutes.” Maiko knows that’s directed at her. She feels that familiar hot, jealous shame that burns under her skin, makes her want to snap something back and be nasty to her manager, but instead she just clenches her hands into fists at her sides and imagines punching the manager in the face.

“Maiko is fine,” Hotaru says, her voice tight and irritated. “I don’t think you’d be able to manage her time,” she says, reaching a hand up and flicking back a pin-straight strand of black hair. Maiko feels a rush of gratitude towards her sister, even though the manager just arches an eyebrow at the two of them before letting out a heavy sigh.

“The target is already out here,” the manager says, angling her head forwards. “I’ll start your time as soon as you get going.”

Maiko nods, chewing at her bottom lip, and beside her, she sees Hotaru makes brief eye contact with her. The gold of her eyes flashes in the light before a smile creeps up at the corners of her lips, and then they’re off, darting through the fields to search for the actor hiding among the wheat.

--

Izuku can still smell the sweet, earthy smell of the wheat as Sasaki pulls her hand away from his chin. He feels tired, exhausted like he’d spent the day patrolling or running around instead of just... whatever that was. Received a memory? Izuku isn’t sure.

Izuku feels disoriented, like he should still be in the field. He knows, vaguely, that it was probably in America, but he’s not sure if that’s something he put together himself or if it’s something he’d picked up from the memory. Everything feels fake and fuzzy and strange.

Sasaki is still crouching in front of him, and she’s frowning. Her eyebrows are pressed down, furrowed above her eyes, and she hesitates for a moment before sighing and stepping back, away from the cell.

“I’ll be back later,” she says, something distant in her voice as she tosses the granola bars onto the ground, within their reach through the bars. Izuku watches as she leaves, but it doesn’t ease the anxiety bubbling in his chest.

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“I don’t think that’s what she meant to show me,” Izuku says, when he’s finished recounting the memory to Shinsou. The taste of honey and chocolate still lingers in his mouth, but eating has only made his hunger sharper, more noticeable. His body wants *more* and he kind of wishes that he’d had the foresight to save the bar for later, so that the next time he got one he could have a larger meal.

“Why would she show you anything at all?” Shinsou asks, his voice dry. “It doesn’t make any sense.” He’s fiddling with the wrapper from his bar, crinkling the foil in his hands as he sits, criss

cross, on the floor.

“It--it doesn’t,” Izuku agrees, because he still can’t work out why *this* is what she’s doing. It’s something that benefits Izuku more than it benefits her, anyway--she’s giving him information, information that could be used against her when they get free. If they get free.

“It can’t actually be a different quirk,” Shinsou says. “She has to be messing with us.” Izuku nods, swallowing around the lump in his throat. The concrete of the cell floor feels cold underneath his legs, but he’s not sure if it’s because it actually is or if his legs are just starting to fall asleep from sitting on the ground for so long.

“Maybe she just--maybe she just figured out how to do it without trigger,” Izuku says. He shuts his eyes for a moment. He wonders if Shinsou can tell that Izuku has a headache, if he can tell that he feels worn around the edges in a way that can’t be explained by hunger and exhaustion alone.

“Why did you do it?” Shinsou asks, abruptly. Izuku blinks before he looks over to him. Shinsou looks surprised at the question, too, and even though Izuku is pretty sure he knows what Shinsou is asking about, he isn’t certain.

“D-Do what?” Izuku asks. His mouth feels too dry, his palms too sweaty. Shinsou takes a deep breath, then meets Izuku’s eyes.

“Why would you tell Aizawa?” he asks. His voice is calmer than Izuku ever would have expected it to be. Izuku would have thought he’d sound angrier, would have thought there’d be rage there. He supposes that they’ve been in the same prison cell for long enough that it would have given Shinsou more than enough time to calm down.

“I--” Izuku starts, but he freezes. His throat feels full of something, feels wet and tight. Izuku knows why he did it--he knows that Shinsou was in danger, knows that he needed to get Shinsou help even if Shinsou really, really didn’t want him to.

“Sometimes, to--to help someone, you have to--to do something they don’t want you to.” Izuku thinks that someone had said nearly those exact words to him at one point, but he can’t remember now, not with all of his anxiety and the fog that fills his head.

Shinsou stares back at him, tired violet eyes widened slightly. Izuku wonders what he’s going to say, what he’s going to do. Izuku thinks it would be fitting if Shinsou hit him, if he yelled or screamed or *something*, but Shinsou just stares for a long, long moment, before he sighs and shuts his eyes.

“You really just wanted to help, huh,” Shinsou says. He sounds weary, exhausted. “I’m still angry at you,” he says. There’s no heat behind the words, at least not that Izuku can detect, but he doesn’t doubt that what Shinsou is saying is true. Izuku swallows, and he nods.

“I’m sorry that--that I got you involved in all of this.” He doesn’t apologize for telling Aizawa about his parents. He’s not sorry for that, even if it’s made Shinsou mad.

“Yeah, well,” Shinsou says, sighing. “It’s already happened, so.” Izuku watches his chest rise and fall as he breathes. “If you want to make it up to here, get us out of here alive.”

“I’ll try,” Izuku replies. What he doesn’t tell Shinsou is that he’s pretty certain that he’s going to have to die at least once to make that happen.

content warning: imprisonment, starvation mentioned, child abuse

[discord!](#) [carrrd!](#)

i hope you enjoyed!! it feels good to be back :D

also!! I'm going to be working on some original projects. if you're interested in hearing more, please join the discord! eventually I'll make another card for the original stuff and link it here too.

over and over again

Chapter Summary

last time: sasaki gives izuku some memories. she's not really feeding them. shinsou and izuku talk

Chapter Notes

hi gamers ready for another update? prison arc pog

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

The next time they hear footsteps, Izuku knows right away that it isn't Sasaki. The steps are quicker and lighter, for one thing, but they also make a dull metallic sound. Izuku knows that it's Miura even before she steps into view, wearing her full Leadfoot outfit except the mask. Her metal shoes have such a distinct sound that even on the concrete in the cells rather than on the ground outside, Izuku recognizes it instantly.

Miura's eye twitches when she sees them. Izuku supposes that they probably don't look great-- Shinsou has been napping on the ground, but he's awake now, his eyes open and watching Miura carefully. It's obvious that they haven't really been able to rest or wash up, and Izuku knows that the bags under their eyes must be impressive even compared to his usual.

"Midoriya," Miura says, her voice quiet. She glances around, like she's expecting someone to appear, because she moves forward and slips a hand into her pocket. Izuku stands up from where he'd been sitting beside the sink, moving up to her as she extends a hand, holding out a handful of granola bars. Izuku blinks, cupping his palms together and catching them as she drops them into his hands.

"T-Thank you," Izuku says, because he's not super sure what to say and he figures being polite can't hurt him. He pulls his hands back as Miura pulls hers out of the bars. Izuku glances back to Shinsou, who's staring at Miura with a wary look on his face.

"Don't worry about it," Miura replies, sighing as she stuffs her hands into her pockets again. "I would ask how you're holding up, but I know how much the boss has been feeding you, so there's not much point in asking." Her eyes move behind Izuku, to where Shinsou is standing up. Izuku swallows.

"We--we're alright," Izuku says, because he wants to say *something* at least. Miura nods.

"This isn't good," she says, and Izuku thinks *that's* the understatement of the year. "This--I had no idea that *this* was what she was planning." Miura looks shaken, almost. Her eyes fix on Izuku, and it reminds him of when he was in the tower for the first time so very long ago, when he'd been *kidnapped* and they were holding him there. When he'd died over and over again in order to escape.

“Is she planning to kill us?” he asks, because he kind of hopes she is. If she’s going to kill him, then maybe his death will turn back time far enough for him to actually do something about it. He can tell from the way that Miura’s lips twist down, the way that her face darkens, that she doesn’t see it as a good thing.

“I think there’s a good chance she will, once she gets what she wants,” Miura says. She breathes out, and Izuku is reminded of the smaller, cautious Miura from the memory. She’s known Sasaki for so long--Izuku doesn’t doubt her judgement, even if she hadn’t known about the trap they’ve been caught in.

“What does--what does she want?” Izuku asks, and he watches as Miura lets her eyes slide shut for a moment as she lets out a weary sigh.

“I have no idea,” she says, her voice cracking, and Izuku is suddenly seeing her in an entirely different light. He sees the way her shoulders are slightly hunched over, the way that the skin under her eyes is marked slightly with violet. He sees the edges of bruises, hidden under the long sleeves and the high collar of her outfit. She looks tired.

“What’s going on?” Shinsou asks, suddenly, and when Izuku turns back to look at him, his face is tense. Izuku realizes that he doesn’t know about how much Miura’s helped Izuku. Nobody really knows *except* Izuku--even Miura doesn’t know about the timeline where she’d tried to break him out from the tower herself. Izuku doesn’t know exactly how far Miura will go for him, but he knows that Ren trusts her, and Izuku knows that he’s willing to put his trust in her as well. *It’s not like it’ll get me killed*, Izuku thinks to himself. *Not for very long, anyway.*

“She’s on our side,” Izuku answers, because he knows there’s no chance Miura will answer Shinsou, not when she knows about his quirk. Shinsou arches an eyebrow.

“Then why the hell are we still here?” he asks. Izuku glances over to Miura, watches as her lips twitch into a tense line.

“I don’t think--I don’t think it’s that simple,” Izuku says, his heart sinking in his chest as Miura nods and sighs, puffing her cheeks out slightly.

“If I tried, I don’t think we’d make it very far,” she says. “But I’m going to.” She takes a breath, staring at the floor. “Try, that is. We just need to know what Maiko wants out of this, because unless we know what she’s planning, I’m not going to know when the best time is.”

“Awfully convenient,” Shinsou scoffs, and Izuku can only stare as he moves forward, up to stand beside Izuku. Shinsou wraps his hands around the bars, leaning forward until his forehead is pressed into the bars. He and Miura are the same height, and when Shinsou stares into her eyes, a snarl on his face, Izuku is surprised that Miura barely reacts, not stepping back or flinching or anything.

“I mean,” Shinsou says, his eyes narrowing and his teeth showing under his lips. “Of course, it’d be too risky for you to actually *do* anything, right? You must think we’re pretty stupid. If you *actually* wanted to help us, if you *actually* were on our side, then you’d--”

“Then I’d what?” Miura asks, cutting him off. She moves forward, so that she’s almost touching Shinsou. “I’d unlock the cell and take you with me, right through the lobby where Manami and Kazuo and Void are all hanging out right now? I’d get all three of us killed because you couldn’t wait?” Miura huffs out a breath of air, waving her hands angrily at her sides. “Go ahead, use your quirk on me. Make me do something poorly thought out that you’ll regret later.” She stares Shinsou down, anger on her face, and Izuku watches with horror as her expression goes slack, as

Shinsou arches an eyebrow.

“Tell me if you’re actually going to help us,” Shinsou orders, and Izuku’s just glad that he isn’t *actually* making her unlock the cell, not when she’d just said who was waiting outside the room.

“I am,” Miura replies. Her voice sounds dull and firm, even under Shinsou’s quirk. Shinsou chuckles under his breath.

“Tell me why,” he says, and Miura doesn’t blink, doesn’t pause before answering.

“Because I don’t want to watch someone else go through what I did,” Miura says, and she pauses for just a second before she continues. “Because of Ren.” Izuku swallows, and he can see Shinsou’s brows furrow slightly before he steps back. Miura slumps over just the slightest bit before catching herself, one hand reaching out and gripping a bar. Shinsou moves to the back of the cell, turning away from the two of them.

“You’d better not fuck this up, then,” Shinsou says. Izuku can hear the relief in Shinsou’s voice, hidden under the tightness to his voice and the hard lines of his shoulders. Izuku glances back to Miura, sees her watching Shinsou with her mouth in a frown, her brows furrowed.

“I know,” Miura says, her voice quiet even in the near-silence of the room.

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The next time they hear footsteps, it isn’t Miura. Sasaki has a wide smile on her face as she steps in front of the cell.

“I hope you’ve been doing well,” she says. “I’m sorry I haven’t been able to visit sooner.” Izuku doesn’t miss the fact that she doesn’t have a bag on her. He supposes she could have food in her pockets or something, but the tight leggings and flowy black dress she wears doesn’t look like it could hide food in it the way that Miura’s suit did. Miura had been smart enough to take the wrappers back with her, so the little collection of wrappers in the corner is still only made up of ones that Sasaki knows they’ve gotten.

“What do you want?” Shinsou asks. He’s been standing; Izuku’d stood up when he heard Sasaki coming, but his legs are still half asleep from sitting. That’s probably why Shinsou manages to move so much *faster* than Izuku had expected, stopping in front of the bars of the cell. He’s almost between Izuku and Sasaki, but not quite.

“Midoriya,” Sasaki says, not even looking at Shinsou. “I think you know what I’m here for at this point,” she says, a hint of a smile creeping up on her face. Izuku swallows.

“We--do we get more food, if--if I do it?” Izuku asks. Sasaki arches an eyebrow. She looks amused, like Izuku had told her a funny joke.

“Oh, Midoriya,” she says, sighing. “Why don’t we see how this goes first, and then I’ll see?” She moves closer to the bars of the cage, and almost reflexively, Izuku steps back. He doesn’t want this--he doesn’t want to be Sasaki, doesn’t want to know her memories. He doesn’t want the strange exhaustion that this power gives him.

“I don’t--I don’t want to,” Izuku says, and his voice cracks in a way that makes him feel small, makes him feel like he’s a child. He swallows, watching as Sasaki’s face twists into a frown.

“I know that you like information,” she says, moving forward again, resting a hand on a bar gently. “Isn’t this just more information? It’s just another way of getting it. This is what you *wanted*,” she

says, sighing and shaking her head slightly.

“Oh, and you’re the good guy?” Shinsou asks, scoffing as he moves forward again. “How generous of you.” Izuku swallows as Sasaki’s eyes narrow. She raises a brow, and suddenly Shinsou hisses in pain, dropping to his knees. Izuku turns to him as he presses a hand to his head, grimacing.

“Shinsou?” Izuku asks, trying to keep his voice low even though Sasaki is going to hear everything he says anyway.

“Headache,” Shinsou grits out. Sasaki laughs.

“Midoriya, why don’t you just make this easy for both of you?” Sasaki says, shaking her head as she laughs. “I have a couple of concussions worse than the one Shinsou’s feeling at the moment, but I’d really rather not hurt him any more than necessary.” Izuku swallows. He steps forward, so that he’s almost touching the bars of the cells.

“Just don’t--don’t hurt him,” Izuku says. “I’ll do what you want.” *I have to make sure he’s okay enough to make it out of here.* Izuku is willing to bear this if it means they last long enough for Miura to help them break out. It’s just memories; what harm could it possibly do?

“Good,” Sasaki purrs, and then she’s reaching for his face. Izuku barely feels the warmth of her hand on his cheek before everything is gone.

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The girl is tiny. Maiko isn’t sure what she was expecting, exactly, but she knows that the kid is about five or six. The filthy little thing standing in front of her, eyes glued to the ground and hands clasped in front of her, doesn’t look like a kid. She looks like a toddler, more than anything, except she’s stick thin and there’s an edge to her face that gives away her real age. Maiko resists the urge to frown. She knows that this kid’s been sold a few times, that she’s supposed to be a real *touch case* or whatever, but couldn’t they have bothered to clean her up a little bit?

“She’s a little nasty lookin’,” the man standing beside her says. “But she’s worth every penny.” Maiko hopes the second part is true, at least. The girl is covered in a thin layer of black soot, partially wiped away around her mouth and eyes, where she must have rubbed at them herself. She’s barely recognizable as a kid, especially given the long, stringy brown hair that’s tangled into a matted mess reaching almost to her knees.

“Explain her quirk to me again,” Maiko says, keeping her voice bland and uninterested. It’s kind of in poor taste to keep a child in conditions this badly, especially when they’re trying to *sell* the kid. Maiko doesn’t want to seem like she approves.

The guy cracks a smile, showing crooked, coffee-stained teeth. “Oh, you’ll like this one, I swear.” He glances down, nudging the girl with his arm. She flinches, and Maiko notes it for later. *They’ve hit her plenty, looks like.*

“Think a lie detector, except it kills the liar,” the guy says, looking down at her. “She like, sets their insides on fire or something. And she can’t turn it off, so you can use her for whatever if you get her to ask a question. She’s gotta ask it, too, and you gotta answer it for it to activate, so it’s easy to avoid if you gotta talk to her, although I wouldn’t recommend it, really.” The child doesn’t even react. She stares at the ground.

“Okay,” Maiko says. “Where’d you get her, anyway?” She doesn’t think that this group has the

skill and sophistication enough to take kids, not by themselves.

“Bought ‘er offa some other guys,” he says. “She killed a couple of them, then it was just the logical thing to do to sell ‘er, I guess.” He laughs, slapping the girl on the shoulder. She flinches again, but doesn’t make a sound.

“What’s her name?” Maiko asks, crouching down so she’s more at the girl’s level. She looks up at Maiko for a second, her big brown eyes widening as she catches sight of Maiko’s eyes. Maiko gives her a little smile. Her eyes, bright green and glowing, are exciting for most kids.

“Ah, she don’t got one,” the guy says, waving a hand. “Been calling her a rat, since she kinda looks like one.” He cackles. Maiko squints.

“Right,” she says. “I’ll take her, then.”

--

Izuku expects Sasaki to still be there when he comes back to himself, but she isn’t. It’s just him and Shinsou. It takes Izuku a moment to process things, to register the cold concrete underneath his back and the fact that Shinsou is sitting over him.

“Midoriya?” Shinsou asks, his brow furrowing. “You’re awake,” he says, letting out a little sigh and leaning back. Izuku blinks.

“What--what happened?” he asks, sitting up. He feels exhausted, like he’s stayed up all night long, and his body is sore and stiff. Izuku turns slightly, glancing at where he’d been lying down. Shinsou’s blazer is bundled up where Izuku’s head had been resting.

“I don’t know,” Shinsou says. “You collapsed, and Sasaki just left.” There’s a question in his eyes.

“It was just the memory thing,” Izuku says, swallowing and rubbing his eyes. “I think--I think that it uses my energy up or something. I’m not sure.”

“Probably doesn’t help that they’re not feeding us,” Shinsou says under his breath. He sounds angry, and Izuku looks over at him, blinking.

“You can... you can have my share of the food, you know,” Izuku says. “You--I’m the only reason you’re in this--this situation s-so it’s only fair.” Izuku watches Shinsou’s brows furrow. “P-Plus, I think your quirk is more--more likely to get us out of this!” Izuku adds. Shinsou’s frown only deepens.

“You’re an idiot,” Shinsou says, sighing and letting his shoulders drop. He stares at the ground.

“Next time, I’m going to take it for you. We’re not gonna be able to escape if I have to carry you.” Izuku blinks.

“You--you should escape without me,” Izuku says. “If that happens.”

“It won’t,” Shinsou says, his voice firm. “And I’m not going to leave you here alone, even if you’ve screwed me over before. I’m not *that* much of an asshole.”

Izuku doesn’t reply. He doesn’t say that it’s not like he can die, that even if it’s something he might survive, Shinsou probably won’t. He doesn’t tell Shinsou that, given the chance, Izuku would get Shinsou out even if it meant seriously injuring himself. It’s the least Izuku can do.

--

Izuku wakes up to the sound of running water. He and Shinsou have been taking turns sleeping, not that there's much point. The room with the cells in it is so echoey that any time anyone has actually come by, it's woken them up. Izuku thinks that it's making Shinsou less nervous, though, and it's really not doing any harm.

Shinsou's bent over the sink, splashing water up onto his face with his hands. It takes Izuku's brain a couple of moments to wake up completely, but when it does, he realizes that Shinsou's just washing his face. Izuku thinks he might give it a try himself after Shinsou's done; he's starting to feel kind of gross. He doesn't know how long it's been, exactly, but he knows that it's been a bit since his last shower.

Izuku doesn't know how long it's been. That fact seems to settle into him slowly, filling the corners of his mind. He'd thought about resetting before, about trying to turn back time, but he hadn't tried. He hadn't done anything about it. He hadn't even really tried to get away from the Gekkeiju on the way here, hadn't struggled in the car.

They would have killed him. He would have died, and he might have gotten another chance. Izuku swallows. He presses his palms into the fabric of his pants. He forces himself to breathe in, even if it's shaky. Izuku doesn't want to be thinking about this right now, but he can't make himself stop.

He wonders when he started letting things just *happen* to him. He used to fight back against everything, used to kill himself over and over again until things were *right*. He remembers the sports festival. He remembers the final exams. What changed? When had he started letting things just happen to him? When did he become so *helpless*?

Izuku stands up from the cold concrete he'd been resting on. He stands up, and he runs a hand through his hair, grimacing at the sensation of grease and grime in his curls. Izuku starts to pace back and forth in the cell, because he suddenly has this painful amount of energy, energy he doesn't *want* burning under his skin.

He should have killed himself ages ago. He knows this, and he knew it in the past, when it would have actually been time to do the deed. And now it's too late. Because, realistically, even if Izuku could kill himself now, even if he banged his head into the bars of the cell until his brains splattered onto the concrete floor? He wouldn't reset far enough back to make a difference, not with how little control he has over his quirk. All of the times he'd used it, he really hadn't *trained* himself. He'd just killed himself as some strange form of self harm, trying to hurt himself, and now he's paying the price.

"Midoriya?" Shinsou asks, and Izuku turns to look at him. Izuku can see the concern on Shinsou's face, can see the way his brows are furrowed and the way he's frowning, but it doesn't seem relevant. It's like how Izuku can feel his breaths coming too fast and too hard in his chest, but he doesn't think that it's that big of a deal, not compared to what Izuku's been doing to himself for months now.

Because it's clear to Izuku, now. By using his quirk as a weapon against himself, by using it as a form of self destruction, he's made it into an enemy. He made it something to *recover from*, even though it should never have been that at all. If Izuku was smart or clever or had some foresight, any *actual* foresight at *all*, he would have been training and not killing himself in the ways that made him *feel good*. He would have practiced controlling what time he'd gone back to, would have practiced resetting before the actual death, like Neito had seen him do that one time with the pills. Izuku wouldn't have told Kacchan anything, wouldn't have let his friends try to convince him he was doing something wrong.

"Midoriya, what's wrong?" Shinsou asks, his voice raised more than it needs to be in the quiet

room. Izuku flinches at the sound, pausing in his pacing and taking a step back.

Izuku opens his mouth to reply, but he can't. There's something freezing his voice in his throat, something stopping him from speaking. He shakes his head, wrapping his arms around his chest. Shinsou steps forward, hands up.

"Midoriya, take a deep breath," Shinsou says. He sounds uncertain, like he's not sure that he's saying the right thing. Izuku swallows. He wants Shinsou to use his quirk on him. He wants to just be calm. He wants to just be *done*.

"S-S-Shinsou," Izuku says. Shinsou's brow furrows, and Izuku feels the weight of Shinsou's quirk on his mind, settling into the cracks like a liquid.

"Calm down," Shinsou says, and there's a sort of uneasiness to it that Izuku wouldn't like if he really thought about it. As it is, Izuku feels the anxiety and the tension drain out of him just before Shinsou releases his quirk.

"S-Sorry," Izuku says, letting out a shaky breath. Shinsou sighs, reaching up to run a hand through his hair. He looks frazzled, but Izuku can't blame him.

"What happened?" Shinsou asks. Izuku swallows, looking down at the floor.

"I just--I don't know," Izuku answers. He wrings his hands together, twisting his fingers against each other. "Was thinking--I was thinking too much."

"Yeah, well, stop doing that," Shinsou says, laughing dryly in that special way that Izuku knows means that he doesn't actually find it funny. Izuku wets his lips with the tip of his tongue.

"You're--you're still mad at me," Izuku says. He doesn't think he needs to ask, really, even as he watches Shinsou's brows furrow.

"I mean, yeah. Is that what--"

"N-No," Izuku interrupts. "It isn't." He pauses, doesn't say anything else. He can feel Shinsou's gaze on him. He knows that Shinsou is waiting for an explanation, is waiting for Izuku to tell him what's going on, but Izuku isn't sure that he *could* explain, even if he wanted to.

"If it--if it comes down to me or you," Izuku starts, the words heavy in his mouth. "Can you--can you choose yourself?" he asks. It comes out as more of a plea. He looks up to Shinsou to see a bewildered look on his face.

"Why would you want that?" Shinsou asks, shaking his head slightly as he speaks. Izuku shrugs, looking away from Shinsou to stare at the ground again.

"I just do," he says.

--

Despite what Izuku had told him, Shinsou speaks as soon as Sasaki rounds the corner.

"I'll do it instead," Shinsou says. There's a fire to his eyes and a hard set to his jaw, even though Izuku had specifically asked him not to do this, not to hurt himself for Izuku's sake. Izuku knows how this goes. Death is temporary to Izuku, but it isn't to other people, not unless Izuku can kill himself in time, and he doesn't trust himself to be able to die in this cell.

Not that this should kill Shinsou, but Izuku isn't taking any chances. That's why he's almost relieved when Sasaki tips her head back and *cackles* at Shinsou's declaration.

"Come here, Midoriya," she says, ignoring Shinsou altogether. Izuku swallows. He moves forward, even as Shinsou opens his mouth to protest. Izuku's glad that Shinsou doesn't try to stop him physically, at least. Izuku isn't sure that he would win in a fight against Shinsou right now, not in these conditions at least.

"Why are you--why are you showing me all of this?" Izuku asks, tipping his head back to look Sasaki in the eyes. She's so tall that he thinks it must be something to do with her quirk; there's just no other way, really.

"I'm not sure how to explain it, really," she says, her eyes narrowing and her smile widening. "But there's a phrase I've heard that I think really sums it up, you know. 'Take a walk in another's shoes,' or something like that." She chuckles lightly under her breath, reaching a hand forward to rest it on Izuku's cheek. "I'd like you to walk in my shoes. I'd like you to understand me, as well as my children." Izuku frowns. He can feel Shinsou's gaze on him, knows that the other boy is wound tight, ready to jump in at any moment.

"H-How will your memories help me understand your--your children?" Izuku knows she's talking about the lieutenants.

"Because I have some of their memories, too," Sasaki says, amusement thick in her voice as she tilts Izuku's head up slightly. "And if I have my way, I'll have yours soon, too."

--

Manami steps into the room, pushing the door open. She's glad that it's open, because the doorknob is higher up than she is tall, and her arms still hurt from when she hit them yesterday night. Kazuo is in bed, still, a bandage wrapped over his face, and Manami bites her tongue inside her mouth to remind herself not to cry again. *Crying won't help my brother*, she tells herself as she steps into the room. It's dark, but she can still make out Sumire's form where she sits in the chair beside Kazuo's bed, watching him sleep.

"Sumimi?" Manami whispers, tiptoeing along the concrete floor. "Is Kazuo okay?"

"He has a fever," Sumire whispers, reaching out a hand to smooth his hair away from his forehead. "But he'll be okay."

"How do you know?" Manami asks, stopping in front of her brother's bed. The wooden headboard is scratched, chipped. Manami knows that most of the scratches are from before they'd picked the piece of furniture off of the street when someone else had tried to throw it away, but one of the scratches is familiar. It's from where Kazuo had tried to carve his name into it one night with a pocket knife stolen from their father's desk.

"He'll be okay," Sumire says again firmly. Manami believes her. Sumire is older than Manami, and she's smarter. Way smarter. She's the one who'd known to lock all the doors and to push the bodies of Mother and Father into the dumpster once they were all wrapped up in the bloody rug and then a layer of black garbage bag from under the sink.

"Are you okay?" Manami asks, creeping closer. Sumire has a dark bruise on her cheekbone from where Kazuo'd hit her when Manami touched him by mistake yesterday. Kazuo's still a little freaked out, all things considered. Manami thinks that she should be, too, but she isn't.

“Yeah,” Sumire says, reaching up a hand to brush her fingers over the bruise. “Your quirk makes him too strong,” she says, the hint of a smile ghosting over her lips. “Have you been practicing?”

“Mhm,” Manami replies. “It’s still the same, though. I can’t do one or the other, it’s all *up* no matter what.” She doesn’t know how else to describe it, really. Her quirk makes everything turn *up* like the dial on the stove that makes the gas flame flicker and grow. She still remembers the first time she’d used it. The memory is so vivid, so bright that she’s trying to ignore it even as it burns in the corner of her memory.

“That’s okay,” Sumire says, but she does that little sigh she does all the time that means she wishes things were different. “They emptied the dumpster this morning. I don’t think anyone noticed the bodies.”

“What was gonna happen if they did?” Manami asks. It’s not the first time she’s seen a dead body, but Sumire had been kind of freaked out about the whole thing. Manami doesn’t really get it. When her father shot the guy who didn’t have the money or the other guy who hadn’t showed up to the meeting on time, they’d been more upset about the lost cash than the bodies. Sumire must not like blood.

“It depends on if they thought it was us or not,” Sumire answers. “If they thought it was someone else, they might separate us.” She breathes out, her gaze still glued on Kazuo’s sleeping form. “If they knew it was us, I’m not sure.”

“Me,” Manami corrects. “It was me,” she says, because she’s half-proud and half-horrified still but it was all *her*. Sumire didn’t wrap her arms around herself and activate her quirk for the first time. Sumire didn’t pick up the baseball bat.

“It wasn’t your fault,” Sumire replies almost instantly. Manami moves closer to the bed. She stops in front of her brother’s sleeping form, setting her hand on the bed beside him. She can see him breathing, can see the rise and fall of his chest.

“It was,” Manami says. “But I don’t regret it.” Manami glances over to see Sumire watching her, a slight crease to her brow. “I’d do it again.” Manami smiles, slightly, then continues. “I’d kill them again if I had to.”

Chapter End Notes

content warning: dissociation, starvation, implied child abuse

[discord!](#) [carrd!](#)

:D i hope u all enjoyed!!! btw if you're bored of them being in jail do not fear, i am too.
it will end as soon as it can and fit the Plot

lights

Chapter Summary

last time: izuku is in jail with shinsou, gets some new sasaki memories including of mouse and one of manami's memories. he also gets granola bars :D

Chapter Notes

hi gamers sorry this is late!!! ive been struggling with depression B) but im all good just demotivated and lazy lmao. anyway here's this i hope u enjoy

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

When they hear footsteps next, it's not Sasaki. They're too quiet, too muffled, and Izuku barely has the chance to wonder if the person walking is barefoot before Manami turns the corner. She *is* barefoot, but other than that, the loose, plain clothing she's wearing is familiar from when Izuku had seen her around the tower in the past.

There's something unnerving about seeing her after getting one of her memories. It's different from when it's Sasaki--Sasaki gives Izuku the memories herself, after all. Izuku doesn't know if Manami even *knows* that Izuku's lived a moment in her life, that he shares that knowledge now, too. Izuku swallows as she gives Izuku and Shinsou a bright smile before plopping down on the ground outside the cell, crossing her legs and waving.

"Hiya!" she says. "I wanted to see you two. It's really boring right now," she says, puffing out her cheeks. Izuku wants to ask why she killed her parents, but he's pretty sure that would be rude.

"It'd be more exciting if you let us out," Shinsou grumbles. Manami giggles, rolling her eyes.

"I'm really excited for tomorrow," she says, leaning forward so that her chin rests on her hands and her elbows are propped up against her knees. "I think it's going to be really cool."

"What--what's happening tomorrow?" Izuku asks, casting a glance over at Shinsou. He can tell that the other boy wants to ask the question, too, but they both know there's no chance of Manami actually answering if Shinsou's the one to ask. Izuku doesn't know that he actually wants to know the answer to the question either way, but he can't *not* ask.

"She didn't tell you?" Manami asks, blinking. Her amber eyes are wide and bright in the light. "Oh. I probably wasn't supposed to say anything, then." She doesn't seem bothered by it, though, and she giggles before continuing. "Oh well! You would have figured it out eventually."

Izuku swallows uneasily. "Can you--can you tell us?" he asks. Manami looks at him and hums.

"Maybe," she says. "I probably shouldn't say much, though." Her eyes are normal, Izuku notes.

"Of course not," Shinsou mutters from beside Izuku. Izuku glances over at him, but Shinsou

doesn't say anything else, just raises an eyebrow at Izuku.

"You'll get to go outside the cell for a bit," Manami says. "The boss has got something big planned." She's smiling, still. Izuku stares at her, wondering if he'd heard right.

"Outside?" he echoes, under his breath. Manami nods, her whole body bouncing slightly.

"Yep! We've got a lot of people waiting to see what happened to you two, you know." She cracks a grin that shows the white of her teeth, and she tilts her head to the side slightly. "A lot has happened since we got you two down here."

"How long has it been?" Izuku asks, almost automatically. Manami shrugs, even though Izuku knows she knows.

"About a week," she says. "A little more. You missed the start of February, you know." She laughs under her breath, before leaning back and unfolding her legs from in front of her. Izuku watches as she hops to her feet, moving away from the cell.

"I'll see you tomorrow," she says, raising a hand in a wave as she turns. "I think I've said more than enough already," she adds, laughing as she walks away. Izuku stares after her, too stunned to say anything.

Shinsou has no such problem. "Wait!" he shouts, rushing forward and wrapping his hands around the bars of the cell. "What do you mean outside? Just outside the cell, or outside the building? What's happening?" he asks, shouting towards the door where they know Manami is headed. Izuku can hear the echoing laugh and the sound of the door opening as Manami continues on despite Shinsou's protests.

--

They have no way of telling time, so it's impossible to know exactly when the next day comes. Izuku can tell that time has passed since Manami left, but he doesn't even know what time it was when she'd come by in the first place, so it doesn't really help him with keeping track of the time. He can tell that it's been hours, at least, judging by how he's had to drink water and use the bathroom.

He thinks that, even he could probably do more to tell when they're going to go *outside*, whatever that means, that it's probably better to not know than to do what Shinsou's doing. He's pacing up and down the length of the cell, his footsteps rhythmic and loud as he counts his steps under his breath. Izuku's noticed him losing track of where he is a few times, but he doesn't think that the counting is about keeping time. Izuku doesn't want to disturb him, either way.

Izuku thinks that it's got to be tomorrow, though, because it feels like it's been *ages*. Izuku isn't sure how much of it is the fact that time passes slowly when there's nothing to do and how much of it is that time has actually passed, but either way, he's not surprised when he hears the sounds of footsteps coming down the hallway.

Shinsou stops, stock still in place. It's almost like someone had taken a picture of him, and if it weren't for the circumstances, Izuku might laugh at it. As it is, Izuku stops and stares too, watching as Sasaki turns the corner. Just behind her, Izuku sees Fury and the Lady of the Void following. Fury and Void are wearing sharp, neatly tailored suits made of matching black fabric. Sasaki is wearing a knee length black dress and strange, golden armor that covers her shoulders, arms, and part of her chest. It shines in the light of the room, and as Izuku swallows uneasily, he notes that there are golden covers on her horns, gleaming in the light. The armor looks decorative

more than anything, especially the gauntlets, which end at her fingers. Under the gauntlets, it looks like she's wearing black leather gloves, and there are golden chains draped over her wings and in her hair.

"Looks like they're already awake," Fury says, and the look on his face is so eerily similar to Sasaki's that it sends a shiver down Izuku's spine. Even if Izuku hadn't shared Sasaki's memories before, even if he didn't know that she'd practically raised Fury, he would have guessed they were related in that moment.

"I bet they didn't sleep," Void says, rolling her eyes. "It's not like we turned the lights off in here." She doesn't seem *happy* about it, exactly, not the way that Fury is, but she says it like it doesn't matter. Fury's lips are curled up in a smile, and Izuku has to stop himself from flinching back as Fury's gaze turns to him, visible even under his dark sunglasses.

"Midoriya," Sasaki says, pulling Izuku's gaze away from Fury. She's watching him with a careful, almost warm look. "I've been waiting for this day for quite a while now. I almost can't believe it's here." Izuku swallows, watching as her smile crinkles the skin under her eyes.

"What's happening today?" Izuku asks. His voice comes out quiet, but steady, steadier than he could have hoped for. He meets Sasaki's gaze, watching as she tips her head to the side slightly.

"I must not have shown you enough," she says with a sigh. "I would have thought you'd understand by now." She reaches a hand up, pushing it through her hair. Izuku swallows.

"We've got about fifteen minutes until July is done, by the way," Void says, and when Izuku looks over at her, she's staring disinterestedly down at a silver and gold watch on her wrist.

"Oh, I know," Sasaki says, moving closer to the bars of the cell. "Midoriya, why do you think I'm keeping the two of you, despite the fact that you're traitors? She meets Izuku's gaze, her eyes burning bright. Izuku takes a small breath.

"We--we're still useful to you," he says. "And you don't--you don't want to lose something that could still help you." He knows that's not the entire truth, knows that Sasaki has to have at least *some* soft spot for children--there's no way that Fury and Manami and Miura were really the best options for her. There's no way that she'd be giving Izuku as many chances as she is if it weren't the case, but Izuku knows better than to push it.

"That's right," Sasaki says, her eyes narrowing. "But that's not all, is it?" She moves closer, looking down at Izuku through thick black lashes. "You have something I want."

"What could he possibly have?" Shinsou scoffs from behind Izuku. "You took all of our shit." Izuku swallows. He knows exactly what Sasaki's talking about.

"Why haven't you used your quirk since arriving here, Midoriya?" Sasaki asks, tipping her head to the side slightly. "It should be something you can activate any time you're in sufficient danger. So why haven't you, then? I would have thought this was the time to use it."

Izuku opens his mouth to reply, but he closes it just as fast. He can hear his heart beating in his ears, can feel the way his breath moves through his nose, in and out too fast. He stares at Sasaki because he's too scared to look away.

"I--why do you--" he pauses, swallows. "Shouldn't you--shouldn't you be glad that I haven't used it?" he offers weakly. Sasaki raises an eyebrow, but her grin widens slightly.

"I know you weren't holding back because you wanted to give me a hand," she says, shaking her

head slightly. “Which got me wondering. *Can* you activate your quirk in these circumstances?” Sasaki asks. Izuku knows that she already knows the answer.

“I-I could,” he says anyway. “I just haven’t.” It’s technically true. He *could* die, if Shinsou strangled him or if he drowned himself or something. He just hasn’t. Sasaki tilts her head slightly.

“I don’t think you’re telling the truth about your quirk,” Sasaki says. “But, of course, I already knew that was the case,” she says, her smile growing into a smirk. “That’s where Haruta comes in.”

“H-Haruta?” Izuku asks. The thought that Haruta might have betrayed them passes through his mind for a moment, but Izuku stops it in its tracks. *Haruta wouldn’t do that to us*, he thinks, even if he’s not entirely sure that it’s true.

“Yes, Haruta,” Sasaki says, taking a step back from the bars of the cell. “He can’t turn his quirk off, you know?” she says, something gleaming in her eyes. “It’s a shame, really.” She grins even wider. “For him, that is.”

Izuku doesn’t want to take the bait. He doesn’t want to ask what that means, but he knows that Sasaki wants him to. He knows how this works by now; Sasaki is telling a story, and if Izuku doesn’t play along, if he doesn’t play his part, he’ll be punished.

“W-Why?” Izuku asks. Sasaki opens her mouth to answer, and Izuku watches, feels his heart beating in his chest, but it’s Void who speaks.

“Sorry, but we’re out of time,” she says. Izuku swallows as Sasaki steps back, moving away from the cell.

“That’s fine,” she says. “I think we’ll have plenty of time to talk, either way.” Her gaze lingers on Izuku, even as Fury moves forward and starts to unlock the cell.

“You’re gonna behave,” Fury says as he slides the key into the lock. “You’re not going to fight, you’re not going to struggle, and you’re not going to use your quirk, *Shinsou* .” He spits out Shinsou’s name like it’s a swear word. “You slip up once, it’s my quirk. You slip up again, it’s a gun.” Izuku swallows. *That might actually be more of a reward than a punishment, at this point* , Izuku thinks. He resists the urge to laugh about it; it would look suspicious for one thing, and for another, it’s really not funny.

“Where--where are we going?” Izuku asks as Fury opens the door to the cell. Fury levels him with a stare through the dark glass of his sunglasses, but it’s Sasaki who answers.

“To the stage,” she says, a smirk pulling at her lips. She gestures forward, beckoning. “Come on, boys. Let’s go make history.”

Izuku steps out of the cell. Shinsou is behind him, his footsteps almost inaudible, but Izuku’s glad he can hear them even the tiniest bit. He doesn’t want to do this alone, even if he knows that, in the end, it’s going to come down to him. He’s going to have to kill himself soon, if Fury or Void or Sasaki don’t do it for him. He needs to take every chance offered to him, needs to get every possible piece of information from this situation. If he doesn’t, then this will go the way Sasaki wants it to, and Izuku may not know exactly what that means, but he knows it won’t be good for him.

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The walk through the building is much the same as before, except any of the lead-plate doors seem

to be already opened. It's probably Miura's doing, since Izuku can't imagine that anyone else would have been able to do that. When they get to the central lobby, all black and white tile, Izuku feels like it's almost *too* neat. His head is filled with that memory of Sasaki's, of this place when they first got there. He shivers as he and Shinsou are led to a door that they have yet to go through. Izuku swallows. It means that they're not going back out through the warehouse that they'd come in through. Izuku isn't sure if that's a good thing or not--if there's a second exit, it's another place that heroes could get through to get them, but if they're not exiting at all, it severely limits his ability to escape here.

Izuku still isn't sure whether they're going to a second exit or not as they walk down the long, dark hallway. The walls are painted solid black, and the floor is the same black and white tiles. The dark colors makes it feel smaller, more claustrophobic than it really is, and Izuku tells himself that that's why he's nervous and not the fact that he is quite possibly being led to something worse than death. *Not that death itself is all that bad for me* .

"It's a bit of a walk, isn't it?" Void says, huffing out a sigh of air. "Kind of weird design, really." She seems bored, but not surprised; Izuku figures that she's been at this facility for a while. She's clearly been working with Sasaki for a while.

"This place was built a long time ago," Sasaki answers, her voice friendly and light. "I must confess that our expansions weren't the most logical." *They built this hallway?* Izuku isn't sure how they would have done that; he doesn't think that you can just hire people to dig tunnels under Tokyo, but maybe things are different when you don't have to follow the law.

"I'm not complaining," Void says. "It makes for an interesting workplace, anyway." Izuku swallows, looking to the side and meeting Shinsou's gaze. Izuku hopes that Shinsou's understanding this the same way that Izuku is, in case Shinsou gets out of this alone. Someone needs to be able to give this information to the heroes, if the Gekkeiju are going to be stopped.

"Here we are," Sasaki says, suddenly. Izuku blinks, glancing around, but there doesn't seem to be any doors or anything. The hallway stretches out in front of them still, fading into darkness up ahead. They stop walking, though, and Izuku is left mystified for a few seconds before a scraping sound fills the space.

Izuku whirls around in time to watch a portion of the wall slide upward, into the ceiling. Izuku blinks against the bright light in the next room, his eyes adjusting to the light. Inside, he can see a huge screen covering one wall, with a camera just in front of it, pointed at two chairs. On the screen, he can see the chairs--they're unoccupied. The bright light seems to be coming from a set of lights along the wall with the screen, pointed at the chairs. Izuku swallows. He has a feeling the chairs are meant for him and Shinsou, and he doesn't like it.

"Have a seat," Sasaki says, gesturing forward with one hand. "We're not going to tie you down or anything." Izuku swallows. He glances over at Shinsou, who gives him a grimace. Izuku wonders if he has enough information for this to be worth him trying to get them to kill him here or not.

"We'll be waiting," Miura says, stepping past them through the doorway. She grabs Fury's arm as they go, tugging him out of the room and into the hallway. The lead plate door slides down behind them, leaving Void, Sasaki, Shinsou, and Izuku in the room together.

"Hurry," Void says. "We need to be live like, now." *Live?* Izuku glances uneasily at Shinsou one more time before he moves forward, sitting in the chair on the right. He turns to his side to watch Shinsou sitting in the chair beside him, looking uncomfortable. They're nice chairs, all things considered--they remind Izuku of the chairs in the conference room. They're more comfortable than the concrete floor of the cell for sure, and Izuku finds himself kind of enjoying the break.

“Go in three,” Void says, moving forward to the wall occupied by the screens. She steps into the corner, messing with something that Izuku can’t see. “Two,” she says. The room is too bright and the corner is too dark, but Izuku thinks he hears typing on a computer. “One.”

The screen flickers briefly. In the top left corner, a small red circle appears, slowly flashing off and on. Izuku stares at the screen, at his own face. It’s shown looking slightly down from center, probably because the camera is above center. Izuku watches on the screen as Sasaki moves behind the two of them, setting her hands on the backs of their chairs and leaning forward, a bright smile on her face.

“Hello, Japan,” she says, her too-sharp teeth shining too bright in the light of the camera. “I trust you’re all a bit confused at the moment, but I plan on explaining.” Izuku shivers as she moves her right hand down, resting it in Izuku’s hair. “I plan on explaining *everything*. You just need to be patient.”

The red circle in the corner of the screen disappears, and Void raises a hand. “Alright, we’re done,” she says. Izuku swallows as Sasaki moves back. He hears a familiar scraping sound, and turning to the side confirms that the lead door is sliding back up, revealing Miura and Fury standing side by side. Miura looks like she feels sick, but Fury just looks bored, rolling his eyes and stepping forward.

“I still think it would have been better if we’d roughed them up a bit first,” Fury says, sighing as he walks into the room. “We could also kill Shinsou. It’d make the point.”

“Why do that when I can get what I want for far less?” Sasaki asks, her voice smooth and calm. “Shinsou is worth far more alive than dead, you know that.”

Izuku glances over to Shinsou, who looks like he’s holding something back. Izuku watches a bead of sweat roll down the side of Shinsou’s face, tracing the edge of his cheek and jaw. Izuku, strangely, doesn’t feel nervous at all.

It’s almost routine when Izuku stands up from the chair and turns to the corner of the room, where Void is by the computer. He may not have done this specifically before, but there’s something familiar about throwing his life away for a reset. It feels like coming home in a way that just straight up killing himself doesn’t; he’s really, truly *using* his quirk when he rushes forward at Void. He’s tired and weak from the lack of food and sleep, but he still manages to throw himself at her as he hears a surprised shout from someone behind him, probably Sasaki. Izuku fumbles against Void, trying to shove her away and to the side so he can look at the computer.

He can see the screen, can see some kind of black and green display that has a lot of text on it, sorted into a few panels on the screen. Izuku tries to read it but his gaze moves instinctively to the side when he sees a flash of movement from Void. Izuku sees the gun, and he knows immediately that he’s not going to get much more out of this run. He throws himself forward once more, so that the gun is aimed at his head and not his stomach like it had been before.

“Don’t--” from Sasaki is the last thing he hears before the world goes white.

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Izuku gasps when he blinks back into his body. He knows he’s in the cell immediately--he can hear Shinsou’s counting abruptly cut off, and when Izuku whirls around to look at him, Shinsou’s squinting at him.

“What?” Shinsou asks. Izuku swallows, taking a heartbeat to compose himself.

“It’s--it’s nothing,” he says, and thankfully, Shinsou doesn’t seem to feel the need to use his quirk. Instead, Shinsou just grunts and turns away to resume his pacing up and down the length of the cell. Izuku relaxes just a second, breathing out slow and letting his eyes slide shut for a minute.

He takes a moment to take stock of what he knows. The Gekkeiju are doing something, something that involves showing someone that they have Shinsou and Izuku. Sasaki had said to *be patient*, that she’d explain--Izuku doesn’t know what, exactly, she’s going to do. He still needs to know that.

They were probably going to put us back in the cell after, Izuku thinks. He turns, moving to the corner of the cell with the best view of the hallway that leads to the door, and he slides down until he’s sitting with his back pressed up against the bars of the cell. The metal digs uncomfortably into his spine, but it’s grounding--he can focus better.

He doesn’t know what Sasaki is doing or why, and that’s a problem. Nothing she’s doing makes sense, really, but one thing for sure is that she knows about Izuku’s quirk, at least a little bit. He has to be careful, or else he’ll end up doing what she wants--she wants him to use his quirk, for some reason. Izuku doesn’t think that she understands it *fully*, at least. If she knew it turned back time, then she’d know that whatever method she was using to determine if he’d used it yet wouldn’t work. In this timeline, in what’s happening *now*, he hasn’t used it yet. He used it in the future, in some instance of time that he might not even go through again. Thinking about it makes Izuku’s head hurt a little.

Izuku can tell by Shinsou’s counting that he doesn’t have much time. He doesn’t remember exactly what number Shinsou had been on last time, but he knows it can’t be far off. Shinsou seems to go back to zero when he gets to one thousand, and he was near the beginning last time, somewhere in the one hundreds. He’s in the nine hundreds now, if Izuku is hearing his murmurs correctly, anyway.

Izuku takes the time to come up with a plan. Resetting doesn’t do much if he can’t either change things or get new information, after all. He wants to tell himself that it’ll turn out alright, that this will somehow end with everyone he cares about okay and safe, but he isn’t that naive.

Izuku knows the sequence of events that this should follow. Void and Fury and Sasaki come to get him and Shinsou. They lead them through a hallway, where Miura opens a door that leads to the livestream room. Fury and Miura wait outside, while Void manages the computer and Sasaki talks to the camera. The video is short, but it promises more. After, they’ll be taken back to their cells, most likely. Izuku isn’t sure on that last point, but he thinks that was what was going to happen.

Sasaki’s the key, he thinks as he hears Shinsou wrap around from one thousand, back to one. *She’s the only one who knows everything, and even if we escape, this won’t be over unless we know what she wants*. Izuku doesn’t know if his plan is smart. He doesn’t know if it will end in him dying uselessly or if he’ll get valuable information for next time. But he does know that no matter what, he’ll get to try again.

So, when he hears footsteps, Izuku moves to the front of the cell. He watches as Sasaki and Void and Fury approach in their formal wear, outfits he now knows are styled to face the public. Izuku faces them down, and when Sasaki’s lips curve in a smile, when he tilts her head to the side, he speaks.

“You know about my quirk,” he says, his voice calm and steady. Beside him, Shinsou throws him a confused glance that Izuku can see out of the corner of his eye. Sasaki blinks, then grins wider.

“I do,” she says. “But how do *you* know that?” Izuku thinks he can almost see the wheels turning in

her head, can almost see her thinking it through.

“You--you should know that already,” Izuku says, swallowing down the anxiety starting to build. He has to be careful not to give Sasaki anything unless it’ll give him information for certain, just on the off chance that this ends up as the permanent timeline. As long as he’s in the cell, he won’t be able to rush Void and take advantage of her pistol. He could still kill himself the less desirable ways, but he wants to avoid that as much as possible.

“You’ve used it,” Sasaki says, tipping her head to the side. “When?” Her smile drops slightly, and Izuku thinks it’s because she’s deep in thought. It’s hard to tell; when someone’s facial expressions are mostly smiles, it’s difficult to know what anything *really* means.

Izuku shrugs. “Why?” he asks. Izuku can tell he’s missing something, here. Why does Sasaki want him to use his quirk? Why does she care when? How does she really know about it, and how *much* does she know?

“I would have liked to be here,” Sasaki answers casually, like that explains everything and isn’t just kind of weird. “But it’s not a problem. Would you mind doing it again?”

“I can’t, sorry,” Izuku says. He feels like himself more than ever, in this moment. It’s odd--he should be scared, should have his heart beating in his ears and his breath stuck in his throat, but instead he just feels exhilarated. It reminds him of his early days as Ace, reminds him of running through the city at night and talking back to villains and petty criminals because he *could* and because he wasn’t Izuku with the mask on.

“Interesting,” Sasaki says, her eyes narrowing. “So, do you know what I have planned for today?”

Izuku nods. “I know,” he answers, and when Sasaki seems to wait for him to continue, he does. “You’re going to livestream the two of us to the world and tell them to be patient with you.” It’s as close to verbatim as he can remember, at this point, and it seems to be good enough to do the trick. Sasaki’s brows rise slightly, and she chuckles as she steps towards the cage.

“That’s impressive,” she says. “I’ve seen it in action before, of course, but it’s still a surprise every time.” She licks her lips, moving towards the latch on the door. “I suppose you know to cooperate, then?”

“They’ll shoot us if we misbehave,” Izuku says, turning to Shinsou. Shinsou looks bewildered beyond belief, but he nods in hesitant agreement, which Izuku is grateful for. He’ll have to add this to the list of things he needs to make up to Shinsou, if something like this ends up being in the permanent timeline, anyway.

“I’d like to know how your quirk really works, at some point,” Sasaki says, opening the cell door and gesturing for Izuku and Shinsou to exit. “I know the basic idea, of course, but the details escape me.”

“Maybe--maybe one day,” Izuku says, because he doesn’t want to share his actual thoughts on the subject with Sasaki, not now. He has a feeling that telling her that he never intends to tell *anyone* who doesn’t already know is kind of a bad idea.

“That’s part of why I’ve shown you everything I have, you know,” Sasaki says as she starts forward, towards the door that leads out of the cell entirely. “It would be unfair for me to not share my secrets with you and expect you to share yours with me.”

“Yeah, and you’re all about fairness,” Shinsou mutters under his breath. Izuku casts a glance over

at him, willing him not to mess this up early in the reset. Izuku wants a chance to figure out what July is supposedly doing, who exactly Sasaki is broadcasting to.

“We’re doing well on time,” Void says as she pulls her sleeve back to look at the watch on her wrist. “We should have a few minutes to set things up when we’re there.” They start into the dark hallway. Izuku hasn’t seen it enough times for it to be familiar yet, but it’s not a *surprise*. Now that Izuku knows what to look for, he sees a number of those lead panels on the walls.

“How do--how do you use this place if Leadfoot isn’t here?” Izuku asks, using her villain name in case it’s something that Sasaki is keeping from Void, even though Izuku’s pretty sure that’s not the case. He watches as Fury, who’s walking in front of the group, casts a glance back at Izuku. His gaze is burning hot, even through the filter of the sunglasses.

Sasaki chuckles. “Both Manami and I are far stronger than ordinary humans,” she says, pausing for a moment before continuing. “Well. She’s stronger *at times*. But, either way, between the three of us, we’re able to get around the facility’s secure areas just fine. Unfortunately for Kazuo, he has to get a little help if he’s on his own.”

“You could have built them so I’d be able to open them,” Fury says with a scoff. Izuku hears a laugh from Sasaki.

“There’s a lot of things we *could* have done,” she says, “isn’t there?” There’s a strange weight to her words that Izuku doesn’t think he really understands. He doesn’t have much time to weigh in on it, because Fury stops walking.

“We’re here,” he says, and Izuku isn’t surprised this time when the door slides up, opening into the camera room. It’s still unnerving to see the wall of screen showing the chairs that he and Shinsou had sat in in another timeline. Miura is waiting for them inside the room, her face carefully blank. Izuku swallows, and as he’s herded into the room, he hopes that he can get something out of this reset, anything at all.

Chapter End Notes

content warnings: panic attacks, thoughts of self harm/suicide

[discord!](#) [blnt carrd!](#) [personal carrd!](#)

i have a personal carrd now! it has links to most of my socials as well as where i will post original works :D

i hope you enjoyed!! this chapter feels kinda pointless and fillery to me but im still trying to get back into the groove of writing so I'll take anything at this point lmao. thank you all for the incredible support you've shown me!! i read every comment and they make my days <3

camera

Chapter Summary

[tbh just read the summary here](#)

Chapter Notes

uh so it's been a while

im not dead!!

sorry for the delay + if there are inconsistencies + if this sucks it's been ages since i wrote for blnt

please be forgiving with the plotline... most earlier blnt chapters i wrote in one day, often in one sitting. this was written over several months. i've also struggled a lot with health issues (both mental and physical) in this time and am REALLY out of practice
rip

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Izuku feels distant, almost, as he moves towards the chairs in the path of the screen without being directed. His mind is whirring as Shinsou glances at him, his face clearly looking for answers. Izuku wishes he could tell Shinsou, but right now, he doesn't have that luxury.

He figures, as he slides into the chair, that he'll have another chance to reset when they leave the room, when they're taken back to their cell. Izuku will be able to act up sufficiently to get taken out, and then he'll be able to turn back time if need be. *I don't have to reset, depending on how this goes*, he tells himself. *I just need to know exactly what's happening before I can make the decision to leave it in the timeline or not*.

"We're stepping out," Fury says to Sasaki. Izuku doesn't turn in time to catch her response, but he assumes it was a nod or something akin to that, because Fury and Miura slip out of the room, the door closing behind them easily. Izuku wonders if Miura has some sense of strain, when she moves heavier pieces of lead, or if it's all the same to her regardless of the size of what she's moving. Void presses some buttons on the computer, distracting Izuku from his thoughts.

"Live in three," Void says. Sasaki moves behind the chairs that Izuku and Shinsou are seated in. "Two." Izuku looks through the side of his eyes at the screen Void's staring at. "One," she says, and Izuku notices the screen shift as she presses a button. Something bright and moving--a video feed of some kind, of somewhere outdoors--disappears. The screen is all black and green again, impossible for Izuku to see any details of. The screen on the wall in front of them bears the red circle in the upper corner. Sasaki breathes in behind him before speaking.

"Hello, Japan," she says. Izuku watches her face in the screen in front of them. "I trust you're all a bit confused at the moment, but I plan on explaining. I plan on explaining *everything*. You just

need to be patient.”

Izuku isn't surprised that it's scripted; he's almost certain, in fact, that those words are the *exact* ones Sasaki had used last time. Even as Void presses a button and the red circle disappears, Izuku gets the sense that every move of this is choreographed. Planned out, mapped down to the moment. *I need to figure out what their cue to start the broadcast is. I need to know why Sasaki is broadcasting.*

“We're done,” Void says, letting out a little breath. Izuku swallows as he hears the sound of the lead rising and opening the doorway once more. He remembers what happens next, and he's not sure he wants to hear Fury talk about hurting them again.

“Why did you livestream that?” Izuku asks. His voice is steadier than he could have hoped for. In the screen in front of them, Sasaki's eyes move to the side. Izuku wonders if she's making eye contact with Void or just looking in that direction.

“The people of Japan likely have a lot of questions right now,” Sasaki says, a sly smile on her face. “I've just given them the answer to one.”

Izuku swallows. He hears Fury snort from behind him, and even though Izuku doesn't want to turn around and look at the man, he can't help but catch sight of Fury's face on the screen. It's then that what Sasaki said makes sense to him--she'd revealed that Izuku and Shinsou were with her, and still alive, at that. Who knows how long they'd been missing--who knows if they're even *alive* , after all that time.

“Are we--we're hostages,” Izuku says, turning in his chair as Miura and Fury move into the room, approaching Izuku and Shinsou where they sit in their chairs. Izuku isn't looking at her, but he hears Sasaki laugh softly.

“You could choose to see it that way,” she says, and Izuku watches Miura's face twist uncomfortably. It's subtle; he wouldn't have noticed if he didn't *know* her. It's all too clear that Fury notices too, though, because he gives her a side eye that makes Izuku want to cower, and he's not even the one it's being directed at.

“We should get them back to their cell,” Void says. She looks unruffled by whatever is going on. “It's a liability to have them out for very long, even with all of us here.”

“I agree,” Sasaki says, turning fluidly to face Izuku. “I expect you'll be using your quirk soon, then?” she asks, tilting her head to the side slightly. “There's no reason to wait, you know. I don't plan on stopping you.”

“I'm not--I don't think you know how it really works,” Izuku says, swallowing even though his mouth is as dry as paper. “It's not--not quite that simple,” he says. Sasaki just watches him closely, her eyes half-lidded.

“Midoriya, what are you talking about?” Shinsou asks, his voice a quiet hiss. “What's going on?” he asks, his gaze turning and raking over Fury and Sasaki. Void huffs out a breath of air from her corner of the room before stomping over to the two of them, her hand shooting out and grabbing Shinsou's lavender hair. Izuku swallows as Void shoves Shinsou's head down, her fingers wrapped in his greasy, tangled locks. Shinsou hisses, his eyes glued to Void's belt, where her pistol sits. It's only visible because her suit jacket has ridden up ever-so-slightly. Izuku can see Shinsou's throat bobbing as he swallows.

“I don't want this one speaking,” Void says, her voice flat. “You're giving them too much leeway,

and it's going to get us hurt. Just get it over with, Phosgene." Her eyes, hard and dark, move to Sasaki. Sasaki grins, but she nods.

"Of course, of course," she says. "Take Shinsou back to the cell, you two," she says, her eyes moving between Void and Miura. "Kazuo and I have some business with this one."

Izuku swallows. Void and Miura exchange a glance, but neither of them seem to want to protest. It's with a fair amount of reluctance that Void shifts her grip to Shinsou's upper arm, tugging on him and moving towards the door. Miura follows, trailing behind just a bit. She looks back as they cross the threshold into the hallway.

"Should I leave the door open for you?" she asks. It's a question directed at Sasaki, clearly, but her violet-brown eyes catch Izuku's for just a moment, and he thinks he gets it. He nods, the smallest movement that he thinks she might see. At the same time, he hears Sasaki speak.

"No, we'll leave this room and go for a little walk," she says, voice smooth honey as she moves forward. Izuku follows behind her compliantly, trying to ignore the sense of unease he gets prickling up his spine as Fury follows behind him. Their footsteps on the hard floor echo ominously throughout the compound as they step into the hallway. Izuku's eyes meet Shinsou's for just a second, and he can see the question there, but he can't think of a way to answer.

The lead door slides shut with a thin, high-pitched grating noise. It seems to claw at Izuku's ears, but he manages not to flinch at it. He watches as Miura nods to Sasaki, before turning back in the direction of the cells. Izuku swallows. He's taking a gamble here, by not resetting, but he's not sure what other options he really has. There's a chance, this way, that Shinsou gets left behind. That Shinsou will be in the cell when Izuku finds a way out, that Izuku will have to leave his friend behind. Izuku has to tell himself that, if that happens, he'll keep resetting until he can save Shinsou too. He has to, because he can tell that the way he's going will get him *something* to work with, at the very least.

"Let's go," Sasaki says softly, snapping Izuku out of his thoughts. Izuku nods, even though Sasaki isn't really looking at him as she turns and heads down the hallway, the opposite direction from where Shinsou and Void and Miura had gone. Izuku shivers. There's a thin chill in the air, the kind that comes from being underground. Izuku wonders if light has ever really touched this place.

"What would it take?" Sasaki asks, her pace even and controlled. Izuku blinks.

"S-Sorry?" he asks. Sasaki casts a glance back at him, one eyebrow slightly arched and an amused edge to her lips.

"What would it take, for you to be willing to use your quirk in front of me? I'd just like to see it once."

Izuku blinks at her, staring at her as she turns to face the way she's walking once again. Fury snorts lightly from behind both of them, but Sasaki doesn't seem to have noticed. Izuku must take too long to answer, because Sasaki starts to speak again, her voice echoing strangely off of the metal walls and ceiling.

"I'm being very honest with you right now," she says. "It's a privilege that not many of my prisoners are afforded." Her wings twitch. Izuku wonders if it's because of emotion, or if she's reacting to something else--he can't see her face at this angle, so he doesn't really know.

"I-I'm grateful," Izuku says. "But my quirk, it--there's not really much to see." *Other than me dying*, Izuku thinks to himself. *But Sasaki's surely seen plenty of people die before.*

“What was it, that you said when we first met?” Sasaki asks. “I can’t recall exactly, but it was something about you knowing things. That you weren’t quirkless.” Izuku swallows. She seems to wait for him, and the eerie off-beat sound of three pairs of footsteps is too unsettling for him not to answer.

“I-I think I told you that I would be--that I’d be useful,” he says. He can’t remember what he’d said in the last go-through. He also can’t remember what he’d told Miura or Fury back then, versus what he’d told Sasaki--they’d all been the same enemy to him then. Now, they’re all so different. Miura doesn’t feel like a threat at all any more, feels like she’s almost on his side. Fury scares him, but only because of what Izuku knows he could do to hurt Izuku. Sasaki scares Izuku because Izuku *doesn’t* know what she can do.

“Do you think that I’d take anyone into my organization with a useful quirk?” she asks, continuing after a heartbeat. “I’m sure you noticed a pattern in who I was interested in.” *Was*, Izuku thinks. *Past tense*. He’s not sure if the analysis is really working to calm him or not.

“Mental quirks,” Izuku says. He breathes in. “Right?” Sasaki nods, a faint smile on her lips.

“It’s really just things that let me experience something I haven’t before,” she says. “Especially the sorts of things that there’s no other way for me to experience.” Sasaki’s lips curl up, revealing her too-sharp teeth. Izuku frowns.

“I-Is that why you have--why you have Fury and Manami?” Izuku asks, his eyes darting to the side. He tries not to look back at Fury for real, but he still catches a glimpse of movement in his peripheral vision, not that he couldn’t hear Fury anyways.

“Not in the way you’re thinking,” Sasaki says with a light laugh. When Izuku turns to look forward at her, she’s facing fully forward again. The hallway curves, here, and Izuku follows her as they turn to the left.

“She didn’t take us just because we were useful,” Fury says, a hint of a warning in his voice. Izuku swallows.

“Right,” Sasaki says. “But they were what gave me the idea in the first place,” she says, chuckling slightly. “I mean, I was powerful before I’d felt Kazuo’s gift, powerful before Manami amplified it for me, but afterwards?” She sighs, something satisfied in it. “I can do things to people that nobody else can, Midoriya. I can make people feel pain like they’ll never feel again.”

Izuku swallows. “So you want--you want other things, to--to use with your quirk?” he asks. Sasaki hums.

“Exactly!” She gestures with her hands. “Of course, quirks that I can actually use in that way are few and far between, really. I have to be able to sense it, have to feel whatever it is the quirk does.” She turns backwards, continuing to walk confidently through the hall. Her neon green eyes are glued on Izuku.

“Until recently, of course,” she says, glee in her voice and in the wide grin on her face. “Now, I have so many more options than I’d ever dreamed of,” she says, taking a few more steps and then stopping. Izuku freezes, not wanting to run into her. When Fury’s steps stop, too, the hallway is so quiet he can hear the three of them breathing.

“What happened?” Izuku asks. His voice is a tiny whisper, but it sounds as loud as gunshot in the echoing, silent hallway. Sasaki’s lips curl up in a sly smile.

“I think you already know,” she says, and then she’s reaching out, laying a hand on Izuku’s cheek. He flinches, but not much. He’s not really trying to avoid her—he knows that she’s going to do this no matter what, even if he has to be held down. That, and honestly? Izuku kind of wants to know what’s going to happen next.

The world seems to dip and swirl, and once again, Izuku is sucked into a memory that isn’t really his.

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Maiko watches as Haruta steps into her office. The boy’s got his hair pulled back in a ponytail, exposing the empty space where he’d have human ears if he wasn’t a mutant type. Maiko doubts that he’d keep it up like that much around people who aren’t mutant types, or at least not around strangers. It speaks to a strange sort of trust—one she hadn’t really expected from him.

When Haruta looks up at her suspiciously, his dark blue eyes guarded with anxiety, she feels it. A thin prickle in the back of her mind, like it’s resting on the inside of her skull just above where her head meets her neck. It feels different than her own quirk, feels *foreign*. It’s still instinctual when she reaches out and grabs it, tugs.

She doesn’t experience the memory instantly like she’d expected. It’s more like she’d *already* lived through it, like it’s in the past, but she knows what’s going on immediately. She can pull up the memory and walk through it like it’s one of her own, and she knows deeply, intrinsically, that she could inflict it on someone else.

She grins, feels the smile stretch her face as she meets Haruta’s eyes. She feels the same prickle that means she can activate her new quirk, means that Haruta is using his own quirk right now. She thinks her way through Haruta’s memory, of him being mocked as a kid—as a little *girl*, unsure of why he felt so wrong and backwards—for his mutant traits. In his memory, he already has his quirk, and he can hear the way the others are thinking more than they’re saying, can hear that their thoughts are worse than their words. He can hear Ema’s pain and anger even as she stays calm to get a teacher. He can hear everyone thinking his birth name, over and over as they mock him in their heads and with their voices.

Maiko watches the realization spread over Haruta’s face. She knows, even without using her new quirk to siphon off a memory, that he’s figured it out. That he knows that she can steal memories now and that he can’t stop her because his quirk? It doesn’t turn off, even when people are thinking things he’d really, really rather not have to hear.

--

Izuku blinks and gasps, reaching a hand up to his face. He swallows thickly, listening to Sasaki giggle as he rights himself, trying to stand up completely. He’s still processing what he’s just learned, what he’s just experienced, and he’s not sure he likes it. He doesn’t think that this is something that he’s ever going to really understand.

“Do you get it now, Ace?” Sasaki asks, her grin stretching her face in a way that looks almost painful. “Or do you need me to explain it to you?” Izuku swallows, taking a step back. He feels Fury step up to him, blocking him with his body, and a flare of quick frustration builds in Izuku’s chest for a moment. He wishes he could have this encounter without Fury here, without the walls of this terrifying, dark building closing him in. He feels like he can’t even be scared properly. He swallows.

“You want me to use my quirk so you can steal the memory of it,” he says. He doesn’t bother

asking to confirm--he knows he's right. He doesn't need to ask. He also knows at this moment, with absolute certainty, that Sasaki fundamentally misunderstood something about his quirk. Izuku doesn't know for *certain*, but he's fairly sure that his quirk literally *turns back time*. It doesn't matter if Sasaki uses her quirk on Izuku--she isn't going to have the memory when time goes back.

"Well?" Sasaki asks. There's a grin on her face. She knows he won't say yes. Izuku's sure of it--she must have some concept of his character by now, even if they're not the closest. He's been betraying her from the start, and it seems that she's known *that*, at least. She must know that, if he *could* give her that power, give her the power to *use her quirk to inflict death*, he wouldn't.

"I won't," he says. *I can't*, he whispers to himself, in the back of his mind.

"You don't have a choice," Sasaki says, grinning wide so that the glowing-white tips of her fang-like teeth show in the eerie light of the hallway. "I know things, remember?" She lurches forward, a hand extended, reaching for Izuku's face. Izuku steps back, colliding with Fury behind him.

"Don't you even try," Fury hisses. His chest is radiating angry body heat and Izuku feels like he's going to choke as he's cornered. Sasaki leans in, wrapping her hand around his throat as she leans in.

"You can't control it," she says. "I remember, or Haruta does, anyway." She giggles, breathy and light as her hand tightens around Izuku's throat. "It's really convenient for me, since this quirk only works on people actively using their quirks, you know? I couldn't use something like this on someone like Sumire or July. Their control is just too good."

She leans in. Her breath smells sweet, like cinnamon gum. "You and Haruta and Shinsou, on the other hand. It's like nobody ever bothered to teach you control." She sighs. "Although, I guess nobody ever did, did they?" Izuku watches her lips curl up at the edges, into a sly smile. "Since this quirk is such a well-kept secret."

"Goodbye, Midoriya," Sasaki says, and the world fades away, familiar and bittersweet.

--

"Hello, Japan," Sasaki says, her voice the same calm, controlled and polite tone she's used before. Izuku blinks at the screen, watching his startled expression stare back at him. "I trust you're all a bit confused at the moment, but I plan on explaining. I plan on explaining *everything*. You just need to be patient."

"We're done," Void says, just as the livestream clicks off. Izuku breathes out. He takes a second to gather himself. *It's a different start point*, he notes. It's not much forward though, not by much at all--they're just already in the livestream room instead of back in the cell. In fact, this might be better--there's not much else that he could have done in the cell or the hallway to be fair. And from what he can see, Sasaki isn't acting differently at all. Her expression is identical, for the most part, to the first time through when he hadn't spoken up. At least, she doesn't seem to remember anything, which is good. Izuku's glad that Haruta isn't here, not just because the semi-starvation and imprisonment would be hard on him. Haruta would also make this infinitely difficult for Izuku to pull off.

"It won't work," Izuku says, as Sasaki moves, presumably to speak to him and Shinsou. If Izuku remembers right, she'll just have them taken back to the cell if Izuku doesn't intervene, but if he gets himself alone with her and Fury, he just gets killed. May as well try this. Sasaki freezes, staring at him with slightly widened green eyes for a moment before realization seems to wash over her. Izuku thinks it might be the first time that he's seen her look startled, *really* startled.

“What won’t?” she asks, tipping her head to the side. Izuku thinks it looks like feigned confusion, but he can’t be sure. Either way, he raises an eyebrow and tries to keep his stutter reigned in.

“Your new quirk,” he answers. Shinsou’s head turns sharply to him. “You can’t steal my memories. My quirk doesn’t view the future, and it doesn’t jump timelines. It turns time *backwards*.” He takes a shaky breath. “S-So killing me does nothing.”

Sasaki stares at him for a long moment. Her face is blank, no smile, no nothing. It’s a strange, foreign look on her. Oddly, it makes her look much younger, and yet familiar at the same time. It takes Izuku a few moments, but after a few seconds of feeling his heartbeat pulsing behind his eyes, he recognizes where he knows that looks from. *She looks like Maiko*, he thinks, a sick feeling pooling in his gut. This is the little girl he saw in the reflective surface of the hospital floor, in the wet eyes of Hotaru. Blank face, green eyes.

The moment passes. Sasaki’s eyes narrow again, her lips curling into a dark smile.

“I don’t believe you,” she says. “You’re bluffing.” The words sound empty to Izuku. He wonders why Sasaki would have shown Izuku so much of her past, when it makes it so easy for him to tell when she’s lying, when *she’s* bluffing. He swallows.

“I-I don’t think that you believe that,” he says. His throat’s dry, though, because he can see the way her feathers are puffing up.

“Who cares?” Sasaki asks, her voice dry and cruel despite the grin on her face. “Do you think it matters? Do you think that it’ll end any better for you, if I believe it or not?” She takes a step forward. “You’re not going to get what *you* want, Midoriya.” She narrows her eyes. “Only *I* get that. *I’m* going to win.” She stares at him for another moment before giving herself a shake, abruptly turning on her heels to face Void, who is staring at the two of them like they have gone absolutely insane. When Izuku casts a glance at Shinsou, he’s giving them a similar look.

He mouths something that’s probably *What the fuck?* at Izuku. Izuku shakes his head. He feels kind of bad for Shinsou, but it’s also a lot to explain right now. Izuku is, quite frankly, a little confused himself. He thinks he knows what’s going on, but he also has no idea. All he knows that is, if he wants to get him and Shinsou out of here mostly-alive, he’s pretty sure he needs to make Sasaki even *more* unhinged. Or maybe that’s a terrible idea. He’s a high schooler, not a psychologist. It feels like she’s giving him a lot more information this way though, and his brain is a little fried from all of the dying and not-eating, so why not? Worst case scenario, he dies. *Oh well*.

“Put them back in the cage. We’ll proceed as planned,” Sasaki says, casting a glance back at Izuku. “I’ll be by to speak with them again before dawn. Of course, I didn’t *expect* things to go smoothly,” she says. Izuku shivers. He knows that’s directed at him.

“Yeah, sure,” Void says, shaking her head slightly. Izuku swallows, takes a deep, shaky breath. It takes him a moment to decide not to reset again, but ultimately, he doesn’t think that he’s going to get anything else out of this point in the timeline. The thing is, right now, he has a leg up over Sasaki, maybe for the first time *ever* since all of this has started. Sure, he’s known things she hasn’t before, had little clues to the future that she didn’t know he had, but he’d never really seen her rattled until just then. He swallows. Izuku thinks that the way Sasaki reacted just then means that she believes him, that she believes deep down that his quirk can turn back time. That she’s not going to get his power. That her plan isn’t going to work.

The question is, then, if it’s in *Izuku’s* best interest for her to remember that. Izuku doesn’t know. It leaves an uneasy, unsettled feeling in his gut, thinking about it. It doesn’t really make sense.

There's something that still doesn't quite add up about all of this, and he doesn't like it. It's not like Sasaki to reveal her hand so early, even if it *is* unintentional, and Izuku isn't even sure he understands it entirely, anyways.

Izuku takes a breath. "I'll--I'll try it," he says, as Sasaki stalks away from them. "I'll try to use my quirk in front of you, so you can steal a memory." He can hear the quiver in his own voice as he says it. He knows that she won't be able to do it, but even so, there's a thin piece of doubt crawling in the back of his head that tells him *what if she can?* and it makes him want to hurl. He doesn't, though. He balls his hands into fists and stands his ground as Sasaki turns, lips curled up in a grin, eyes narrowed and bright.

"You're that sure of yourself?" Sasaki asks, arching an eyebrow up. Izuku swallows, nods. He's certain, now, that Shinsou and Void think he's absolutely insane. Sasaki, too. He wonders if she actually is or if she's latently picking up on emotions or logic from other people's memories or something.

"I-I am," Izuku says. *I'm not sure of myself*, he thinks to himself. *I'm sure of my quirk*.

"Okay then," Sasaki says. "What do you need?" she asks, tipping her head to the side slightly. A lock of hair that had been tucked behind her ear falls away, angled towards the ground.

"Shoot me," Izuku says, his eyes moving to Void. Her brows knit together slightly. Her eyes meet his briefly, like they're looking for something, but then Sasaki says,

"Do it," and Void pulls out her gun. There isn't much of a pause, then. Izuku shuts his eyes, but he isn't really sure why. He knows what it sounds like as the slide of the gun is pulled back and the trigger is pulled.

Chapter End Notes

content warnings: torture, child abuse, starvation, uh i think ref to self harm

[discord!](#) [blnt carrd!](#) [personal carrd!](#)

i can't promise regular updates. i am going to ATTEMPT once a month. that may not happen.

please no negative comments.

i read all comments. i rlly rlly rlly appreciate the continued support even with my absence. it means a LOT to me. yall have no idea.

action

Chapter Summary

last time: izuku and the gang (shinsou and depression) do the camera sequence a few more times while izuku taunts sasaki and generally figures out that she's got a quirk that lets her take memories from ppl when they use their quirks and that she wants a memory of him dying so she can inflict in on others lolz

Chapter Notes

me when i don't update for two months and then write the whole chapter in a day:

MY GRAD SCHOOL APPS ARE DONE IM SO HYPED THAT MEANS BLNT AGAIN!!!

ok take this sorry if she sucks i literally don't know what im doing uwu

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“Hello, Japan,” Sasaki says, for the umpteenth time. Izuku finds himself imagining that somewhere, there’s an audience who’s heard it as many times as he has. He imagines that it’d be very frustrating for them, too. “I trust you’re all a bit confused at the moment, but I plan on explaining. I plan on explaining *everything*. You just need to be patient.”

“We’re done,” Void says, just as the livestream clicks off. Izuku feels like he’s been very patient, is *being* very patient as he waits for Sasaki to move, stretching slightly and smiling. Izuku swallows, glancing slightly to the side at Shinsou before he speaks. He doesn’t have a plan, exactly, except to wing it. He hopes it’ll work, because he knows it’s been... well, it’s been a *few* resets at this point.

“Um, s-so what are you planning to do at dawn?” Izuku asks, shifting nervously. He tries to play up his nerves, tries to act like he’s been through more than he has. “You--I know you want me to--to use my quirk, but I--I can’t...” he trails off, looking off to the side slightly, but not so much that he can’t see Sasaki. He definitely can’t miss a smile *that* big.

“Midoriya,” Sasaki says, shaking her head. “You’re really a terrible liar,” she says, giggling under her breath. Izuku freezes, swallowing. He doesn’t have to fake the anxiety that rushes through his veins this time, although he has to admit he finds it somewhat ironic that she’s saying he’s *bad* at lying, given how long he’s been lying to *everyone*. *Although, I suppose she’s known this whole time, more or less.*

“A-A lot of people would disagree with that,” Izuku says, swallowing down the fear building in the pit of his throat. Sasaki just chuckles, shaking her head like she’s amused more than disagreeing.

“If you really couldn’t use your quirk, you wouldn’t know what was coming up next, would you?” she says, laughing lightly. It’s something that Izuku knows now means she thinks she’s in control,

that she's holding all of the power. It's a good thing, right now, because Izuku needs her *not* suspicious, but a little shiver still crawls its way up his spine.

"I'm not--I'm not in grave danger yet, am I?" Izuku tries, because even though he's been through this part of the timeline quite a few times at this point, he's almost certain that Sasaki hasn't had him confirm his quirk isn't actually just looking into the future, not yet. Sasaki's eyes narrow, and he knows he's getting his times right, because she smiles slyly, like they're sharing an inside joke.

"I don't know," she says, a dark eyebrow raising over a neon-bright eye. "Are you?"

"Hello?" Fury calls from outside the room. "Are we good to open up?" he shouts, his voice muffled by the lead. Izuku blinks. *That's new*, he notes, although he can't think of a reason why anything he's done this time around would change how *Fury* is acting. Maybe this is just the longest they've waited to have Miura open the lead door, and Fury is impatient. Izuku's head feels a bit fuzzy, but he isn't sure if it's from using his quirk too much or if it's simply from the lack of food. It's annoying that he has to consider that, now. With all the practicing he's done, he has no idea what his limit is, either. And he hasn't exactly been counting resets, which doesn't really help.

"Oh, you can open the door, Sumire," Sasaki calls, and Izuku swears he can hear Fury snort from the other side of the metal. There's a pause before the door slides up. Izuku takes the moment to glance over to Shinsou, who gives him an incredulous look and mouths *What the fuck?* at him while gesturing wildly with one hand. Izuku just gives him an uneasy smile. Regardless of which reset sticks, poor Shinsou is going to have a *lot* of questions, it looks like.

Izuku starts to plan out how he's going to get them to kill him before he realizes, abruptly, that he doesn't *have* to die this go around. Well, not immediately, anyway. Izuku thinks he's got a pretty good grip on what Sasaki knows about his quirk and what she wants from this chunk of time. He doesn't know what's happening *next*, but, well, isn't that the whole point of being able to turn back time? If he never lets himself *get* to the future, he's not going to learn anything from it.

Izuku swallows. This is a good reset to let things move forward on, anyway. Shinsou's uninjured, Sasaki thinks she's got the upper hand, and Izuku has plenty of information. He just... he just has to grin and bear it. That's all it'll take.

"Let's get them back to the cell," Miura says, her eyes moving over Izuku and Shinsou. Her voice is neutral enough that Izuku can't detect any emotion in it at all, but he wonders if she's worried about them. Even though they're unhurt, Izuku knows they both look utterly exhausted.

"Good idea," Sasaki purrs. "I'd like to finish preparations before dawn," she says, her eyes sliding over to Izuku. "Especially since this one seems to already know something's going to happen. I wouldn't want him to mess anything up." She doesn't sound concerned, not at all. Izuku doesn't blame her. He's not sure how he'd get in the way of any of her plans, not this time around, anyway.

--

The cell feels familiar in an unpleasant way. The concrete floor is cold underneath Izuku's legs, seeping through the fabric of his pants. *At least they turned out the lights this time*, he thinks dully. He's lying down, even though the ground is cold and hard and unforgiving. He's exhausted; there's no way around it. Something about either the resets or the deprivation or the stress or Sasaki's new quirk has taken his energy from him, and he doesn't have it in him to stay awake. His eyes keep slipping shut, and even though he can't really fall asleep for long, the few precious moments of sleep he steals feel like magic to his mind.

Izuku can see Shinsou in the dim light. It's not completely pitch black in the cell--there's something illuminating the room that Izuku would think is moonlight, if he didn't know better. It's that same pale blue, silvery kind of light. It seeps out of a light fixture in the ceiling, though, so he suspects it's a sort of emergency light, set up so that the Gekkeiju can see the prisoners even if the lights are all off. Either way, Izuku's grateful for it. It's not bright enough to disturb him, but it means that they've been able to move around the cell well enough.

Shinsou's hair looks grey in the light. His skin does, too, but it's a lighter sort of grey. He's watching Izuku openly, not making any effort to hide it. Izuku wonders if he should be disconcerted by it, concerned. He's not, though, and he chalks it up to a mixture of exhaustion and being literally unable to permanently die.

Shinsou opens his mouth, his brows creasing slightly, but whatever he's about to say is interrupted when the door to the dungeon opens, letting yellow light spill into the darkness. Izuku hears soft, quiet footsteps, sees the yellow light disappear as the person shuts the door behind them. He sits up quickly, head spinning as he turns from his spot on the floor to watch as whoever it is steps in front of the cell. For a terrible moment, he's terrified that it's already dawn--that the night has already passed, that his time to rest is over and that he has to face whatever it is that Sasaki has planned for him. Then, he sees Miura, her hair down and her face set in a worried frown.

"I have to be quick," she says, her voice near silent. "Nobody knows I'm here." She's wearing a pair of dark leggings and an oversized sweatshirt. *Pajamas*, Izuku realizes. Everyone else probably thinks she's asleep. She lifts her shirt up, revealing a fanny pack strapped over her waist, and she unzips it. She pulls over two foil wrapped packages, pressing them through the bars quickly.

"Thank you," Izuku says, reaching out and taking them. They're still warm, whatever they are. He hands one to Shinsou, who takes it gratefully. Izuku unwraps it, revealing what appears to be a hot sandwich filled with meat and cooked vegetables.

"It's leftovers from what we ate," Miura explains. "Some of us have to eat extra because of our quirks, so if it's missing, nobody will question it." Izuku nods, swallowing. His mouth waters at the sight of the food as his body seems to wake up, remembering how hungry he is. He waits until Shinsou has his first bite, though, before he starts to eat.

"That's not the only reason I came though," Miura says, sighing as she turns to look at the ground. "This... you know this is bad." Izuku swallows his mouthful of food. Miura sounds defeated. There's a weight to her words, a slump to her shoulders that Izuku doesn't want to see. It scares him.

"Of course it's bad," Shinsou says, voice dry. "Not exactly our fault." Izuku glances over to him. He has one eyebrow arched up, a skeptical look on his face.

"I know," Miura sighs. "You don't have to believe me, but I don't know what her plans are for tomorrow." She looks down at the floor. "I think she suspects me," Miura breathes. The shadows on her face and the pale, silver light make her look younger than she is. She looks almost like she's made of the grey-violet metal she controls.

"She--she probably does," Izuku says, biting at his lower lip. He remembers the memory of Sasaki taunting Haruta with his new quirk. "She, um, she has access to Haruta's quirk, so--so it's not out of the question."

"She *what*?" Shinsou asks. He sounds confused. "Hasn't she always had access to him?"

"No, not--not like that, she--" Izuku swallows. He sees the dawning realization on Shinsou's face.

“Shit,” he says. “Fuck,” he adds, reaching a hand up to run it through his hair.

Miura sighs. “Could you fill me in?” she asks pointedly. Izuku can hear the raw frustration in her voice.

“We, um, we think Sasaki got--she got another quirk, when you broke Kurogiri out of prison,” Izuku says, swallowing. “It lets her take memories when someone uses their quirk.” He steals a glance up at Miura. She’s staring at him.

“She--she was going to do that.” Miura shakes her head. “Maiko, she--she’s always been planning that.” Her eyes are wide.

“And she, if she got it, she’d--Haruta’s quirk is always active so if--if he was near her and she got his memories--”

“She’d know some of what he knows,” Shinsou says. “Depending on how selective she can be about what memories she can take, anyway. It seems like she doesn’t have the best control over which ones she *gives*, judging by what Midoriya said earlier.” He chuckles dryly. “That’s probably the only reason we’re not totally fucked.”

“She’s been giving you memories?” Miura asks, her eyes moving over to Izuku. Izuku nods jerkily, his throat feeling oddly dry. Miura swallows, wetting her lips with her tongue.

“I--I just--” Izuku shuts his eyes. “Can we talk about that after?” It’s a stupid plea, a pointless one. He doesn’t even know if this will even end up being in the permanent timeline after he resets, but he just--he doesn’t want to worry about the memories, not right now. He wants to focus on *surviving*. The future is far more dangerous than the past, right now.

“Okay,” Miura says, surprising Izuku enough that he opens his eyes. “But we will need to talk,” she says, looking down and to the side, an uncomfortable expression on her face. “For now, I.. I’m going to put my trust in you, Midoriya.”

Izuku blinks. “W-What?” he asks, startled. From the way Shinsou stiffens, he’s surprised too.

“I’ll do what you ask of me,” Miura says. “You can see the future, so you know better than I do what’s going to happen. You saved Ren and Mouse. I.. I don’t care if I survive this, not really. But I’d like it if the two of you did. And It’d be nice to see Ren again.” She looks up at him, meeting his gaze with a blazing violet light in her eyes. “So, Midoriya, I’m leaving this up to you.”

Izuku swallows. He clenches his hands into fists, feeling his nails bite into the flesh of his palms, pinpricks of grounding ice in his skin.

“For now...” he pauses, eyes darting over to Shinsou. “Just wait, okay?” Shinsou’s brows furrow. “I--I don’t know what’s going to happen, yet. I have to--I have to wait and see, to make a plan.”

“Are you sure?” Miura asks. There’s no doubt in her voice. The plain, simple loyalty is overwhelming, and Izuku suddenly understands exactly why someone as good as her was with a villain organization for so *long*.

“Yes,” Izuku says, far more confidence in his voice than he really feels. “I’m sure.”

--

Izuku’s half awake when the door opens again. He’s lying on his side, curled away from the door, but his eyes shoot open at the noise and he sits up. He’d felt *worlds* better with the sandwich in his

stomach, and sleeping had been a lot easier, but it's not doing much for his nerves, not when the lights flicker on in the room. Shinsou's still awake, and Izuku's not sure he ever slept. Izuku hauls himself to his feet, turning to face the front of the cell just as Sasaki steps into view.

"Good morning!" she chirps, giving them a little wave. She's wearing a knee-length, black and green dress with gold embroidery on it. Her gold jewelry and armor is familiar at this point, although Izuku's a bit unnerved by the fact that she seems to be wearing even more of it than previous days. Her fangs seem longer than normal, too, and the green leaf patterns on her dress make her eyes look even brighter.

She stops in front of their cell. Izuku notes that she's armed--there's a pistol strapped to her hip on one side and a long sword sheath on the other. The sheath itself is gilded in gold and glitters with green gems.

"Not going to greet me?" she asks, chuckling under her breath as she moves to the lock on the cell. "That's fine. We'll be seeing a lot of each other today, though, so try not to be *too* grouchy, or it'll just be miserable for the both of us." She unlocks the cell with a click, the door swinging open. She steps back, gesturing with one hand in a sweeping motion towards herself. The glittering gold gauntlets and rings on her hands are glittering in the light. Izuku realizes, belatedly, that the lights had turned on at some point while he was sleeping.

Nervously, he steps out of the cell. Shinsou follows behind him, and Izuku wonders if the fear that his friend feels is greater than his. Shinsou doesn't know that Izuku can turn back time--he doesn't know they'll all get another chance, if this first one goes wrong. Izuku feels a burst of sympathy in his chest, red hot where it mixes with guilt. He wishes, briefly, that he'd told Shinsou. It wouldn't do much good to tell him now--Shinsou wouldn't really have time to process it now, anyway. But if he'd told Shinsou back when he told Kacchan, maybe Shinsou would understand. Maybe it'd be easier for him.

The path Sasaki leads them down is familiar. Izuku feels like there's a lead weight sinking down into his gut as he realizes they're headed back to the camera room. It's an awful realization, because some small part of him was holding out hope that they'd be going outside. That there'd be a chance for escape or for him to signal their location to someone, at least. Maybe he could just *get* their location-- he hadn't even thought to figure it out, before they were brought into the base. Izuku hates himself for that. If he'd thought more clearly on the way here, things may be different now.

"I'm not doing this shit again," Shinsou murmurs, and Izuku only has time to shoot him a warning glance before Shinsou stops, turns and starts to run. It's the kind of quick, desperate sprint that only comes when someone's running for their life, and Shinsou *is* --Sasaki has a gun, after all. Izuku reaches a hand out, mouth opening to tell Shinsou to *stop*, that this is a terrible idea, but he doesn't have to. Shinsou freezes, falling and catching himself on hands and knees before he makes it far at all.

"That's cute," Sasaki says, and Izuku hears Shinsou hiss in pain. "But you're not getting anywhere while your brain thinks your legs are broken." *Legs*, Izuku thinks dully. *Has she broken both at once?*

"Fuck," Shinsou spits. His voice sounds shaky, and even though he's a few meters down the hallway from his attempted escape, Izuku can see how pale he is. He thinks he can even make out the sheen of sweat coating his skin. He can *definitely* see how his arms shake, how he trembles with what must be agony.

"Do you want to behave now?" Sasaki asks, her voice a mixture of sweet and nasty. Shinsou doesn't reply, but Izuku can tell she releases her quirk anyway--the tension drains out of Shinsou

and he collapses forward out of relief for a moment, breathing out.

“S-Shinsou?” Izuku asks, his voice shaky. Shinsou sighs, pushing himself up to his knees before rising to his feet.

“Yeah,” Shinsou says. He doesn’t stutter, but his voice is uneven all the same. “Yeah, I get the fucking point.” There’s a bitter sort of defeat in his voice that squeezes at Izuku’s heart painfully. Izuku hates this, but there’s not much he can do about it, not like this. He can see that Shinsou’s swaying, though, and Izuku moves forward to stand beside him.

“You can--you can lean on me,” Izuku offers, not wanting to just *grab* Shinsou. It’s not the same, he knows, but he wouldn’t want someone grabbing him out of nowhere, and he suspects Shinsou is much the same. Shinsou glances at him, something unreadable in his gaze before he nods shortly, draping an arm over Izuku’s shoulder and leaning a fair amount of weight on Izuku. Izuku can hear a tiny sigh of relief that he’s sure Shinsou is trying to hide. *He must still be in a lot of pain*, he thinks. He wonders if Sasaki really let her quirk go or just switching to inflicting something milder, maybe the same injury but partially healed.

“Adorable,” Sasaki coos. Izuku glances over to her, seeing her pressing her hands together in front of her face. The grin on her face is sinister, and Izuku can’t help but shiver at it. “Let’s get going, shall we?” she asks, tipping her head to the side. “I’m sure at least one of you knows where we’re headed.” Izuku wonders if she thinks he’s already reset, or if she just expects them to remember the route.

Izuku swallows. He doesn’t reply verbally, but it seems he doesn’t need to because Sasaki starts walking again. Izuku helps Shinsou down the hallway, noting that he seems to become more and more steady as moments pass. It calms Izuku down somewhat--at least whatever Sasaki did isn’t long-lasting. By the time they’re at the entrance to the camera room, which is open unlike last time, Shinsou’s almost walking on his own. When they stop outside the open doorway, staring inside at the screen that’s turned off and the empty space where the two chairs used to be, Shinsou lifts his arm off of Izuku’s shoulders.

“I’m okay,” Shinsou murmurs. Izuku nods. Sasaki glances back at them, eyes narrowed and smile thin and Izuku knows this was intentional. It makes him feel sick to his stomach. She gestures to the room.

“After you,” she says, her voice smooth as silk. Izuku swallows. He steps into the camera room. The screen remains off. The laptop is still in the corner, although the screen to *that* is on. The options seem simple, though. Izuku can make out a red button that looks like it says *start*, a blue one that says *switch*, and a greyed-out one that says *stop*. Everything else is in too small a font for him to see.

Sasaki steps into the room after them. With her wings and her height, she easily blocks the doorway. It doesn’t seem like she’s overly concerned about it, though, because she walks past the two of them without a second glance, moving to the laptop. She touches the trackpad, her fingers brushing over it, and clicks the blue *switch* button. The screen flickers to life, going white first and then displaying the view of the room, showing Izuku and Shinsou staring up at it. They look small and terrified. Sasaki chuckles, then clicks the button again.

The screen changes, and Izuku can’t help the gasp that escapes him. He doesn’t recognize where, exactly, the footage is from, but he knows it’s somewhere in a city. It takes him a moment to process that it’s probably Tokyo--it has to be, because he’s almost certain he sees the Tokyo Tower in the background.

It's hard to recognize, either way, because what Izuku's staring at looks far more like a battlefield than a city. The center of where the camera is focused on has been completely destroyed--it looks like a bomb has gone off, something much, much bigger than Izuku's seen Kacchan make with his quirk. The ground is *flattened*, and despite the fact that it should be the easiest area to fight in, nobody is in the center. Nobody living, anyway. There are corpses, charred and uncharred alike, lying motionless in the crater. Izuku feels sick.

Around the crater, though, where there's still rubble, Izuku can see people moving. He feels something chill his bones when he recognizes them--he can see Mirio darting through masses of twisted metal, can see Ren's braid whipping in the wind. He recognizes the flames of Endeavor, although he doesn't see the man himself, and he thinks he even spots Mirko, hopping through the rubble carrying civilians, although she's moving so fast it's hard to make out her form.

Further out, there are still intact buildings, and that's where Izuku spots them. There are giant screens--huge, bigger than any TV Izuku's ever seen--and they're blank until he hears the clicking of a mouse. Izuku knows what's going to happen even before the screens surrounding the crater flicker to life, showing exactly what he'd see on his own screen moments before--himself. He and Shinsou, heads tipped up to watch something that isn't quite in line with the camera, tired and small.

"Fuck," Shinsou whispers. Izuku has to agree. He feels his heart sink even lower when he spots the next thing. It's off to the side, almost out of frame at first, so he doesn't notice it until there's movement, but as soon as Izuku sees it, he can't tear his eyes away.

"Shinsou," Izuku says, urgency in his voice. At the edge of the screen, there's two small figures standing atop a tall building. One is short with teal hair whipping around her, and the other is tall and wearing strange, metal protective gear. The taller of the two, holds a large cloth with something embroidered or drawn on it. He shakes it out, and as Izuku watches, a *helicopter* emerges from the fabric. *Threadbare and July*, Izuku realizes dully as the two step into the helicopter. Izuku can't process why Threadbare is wearing armor, of all things, but he knows how they got the large screens now, at least. Threadbare can make practically anything with enough time--and it seems like he's had a lot.

"What's her quirk?" Shinsou asks. There's something to his voice. Izuku looks over to him, feels his brows knitting together.

"She--she detects sensors," Izuku says. "I-I think, that's what--" he's cut off abruptly as Sasaki laughs, clear as a bell and loud in the echoey room.

"Oh, so is this the first time, then?" she asks. "God, how lucky I must be!" Izuku glances back to her, sees real, genuine *joy* in her glowing eyes. It feels like someone's dumped ice water down the back of his shirt. Izuku feels Shinsou grab his shirt sleeve, and Izuku turns back to the screen.

"She's not detecting anything," Shinsou says dryly. Izuku watches as the helicopter grows closer to the camera. He can make out more details, now. July is *glowing*. It's not like Aoyama or Sasaki, though. It's more like how Mouse glows or how Izuku had glowed when Mouse's quirk got him. July glows from the inside, her body lighting up from within like she's swallowed a flashlight. There's a wicked grin on her face. Threadbare is completely covered in dull, violet-grey metal. *Lead*, Izuku notes, his brows drawing together.

"I'll give you a choice, Ace," Sasaki says. "I think that, by now, you have some idea of the situation you're in." Sasaki reaches down, her hand sliding to the gun at her right hip. She pulls it from the holster smoothly, cocking it before aiming it at Shinsou's head, her hand steady and her smile wide as her eyes narrow.

“I have two hostages,” Sasaki says, tipping her head to the side. “Tokyo first, and then your little buddy.” Her teeth gleam, reflecting the colors of the screen. “This show isn’t for Japan, you know. It never has been.”

“You--” Izuku starts, but Sasaki talks over him.

“This has all been for you,” she says. “I hope you believe me when I say that I’ll stop at nothing to get what I want from you.”

“I *can’t*,” Izuku says, shaking his head. He feels the fear and panic rising in his throat, and he almost misses when Sasaki’s eyes narrow and her left hand moves, flicking outward in a clear signal. Izuku swallows, stepping back, but nothing happens, not to him, anyway.

There’s no sound on the broadcast, but it doesn’t make what happens any less horrible. Izuku watches as July grins wider, says something to Threadbare, and leans over in the helicopter, out the open side of the thing where it hovers over the ongoing fights below. The light within her intensifies, growing so bright it looks like she’s going to turn into flame, eyes and nose and ears all white-hot and her skin angry red and leaking light, before she opens her mouth.

A tremendous beam of energy is unleashed, streaming out onto the ground and slicing a path down at an angle, missing the helicopter but still knocking them back a fair amount. Izuku understands, immediately, how the crater from before was made. It must have been a warning shot. July’s beam of energy cuts a slice through the damaged buildings and forward, into undamaged city. Izuku watches with horror as the beam, so bright that it looks like pure white on the screen, slices directly through where Mirio, Ren, and at least a dozen civilians are working.

Distantly, Izuku notes Shinsou gagging next to him. The beam has faded, but the camera looks like it’s struggling to recover from the brightness of the light. There’s flames on wooden structures that had been nearby, but everything in the direct path of the beam is *gone*. It’s just a streak of stone, straight down to bedrock, Izuku thinks. There’s no gore or carnage there.

Next to the beam, directly adjacent, is worse. It’s far from the camera, so it’s hard to make out, but Izuku can still recognize the charred bodies and, further out, the people running and stumbling away. He can see that people are stopping to vomit, collapsing in pain. Izuku feels dizzy at the sight. July, whatever her quirk is exactly, must have just killed hundreds, injured thousands. He can’t even see the end of the beam.

“Well?” Sasaki asks, her voice light, like she hadn’t just ordered a massive attack on Tokyo. “Are you ready?”

“You--you know that--that my quirk d-doesn’t work like that,” Izuku protests. He turns to her. He can see that Shinsou vomited. The boy is holding a hand over his mouth, staring with wide eyes at the scene on the screen. Izuku thinks that, to Shinsou, that’s all permanent. There’s no going back for him.

“Well, I think that a lot of things can change when someone’s really desperate,” Sasaki says with a shrug, smile still firmly on her face. “And correct me if I’m wrong, but I think I get as many chances as I want to get this right.” She grins, wicked and sharp, and Izuku doesn’t even get a chance to process before she’s pulling the trigger. Shinsou’s blood splatters with the bang of the gunshot, coating Izuku in iron-sharp blood. He can’t breathe. The body hits the floor.

Izuku thinks he might have screamed, or maybe he holds his breath, because he feels dizzy. He drops to his knees, kneeling in front of Shinsou’s corpse. Sasaki laughs, her voice loud in the space. Izuku shakes his head.

“I-I can’t!” Izuku shouts, his voice high pitched and *loud* . “I can’t--I can’t I can’t I can’t!”

“Can’t or won’t?” Sasaki asks. Izuku registers that she’s lifting the gun up, pointing it at him, but he doesn’t care. He can feel warm blood pooling on his lap, under his legs. Shinsou’s blood, still hot because there’s been no time at all for it to cool. Izuku shuts his eyes. He shakes his head. He hears the gun cocking, hears the empty casing from the last bullet hit the ground, he hears the gunshot, and then he hears nothing.

Chapter End Notes

content warning: death destruction blood gore vomit

[discord!](#) [blnt carrd!](#) [personal carrd!](#)

tysm for your patience!!! ive been SO excited to update again FINALLY ugh

earthshattering

Chapter Summary

last time: sasaki was like "lol btw gimme ur death memory or i nuke tokyo" and izuku was like "i cant" and sasaki went "cant or wont?" and then nuked tokyo and then izuku went "cant" and sasaki said "wrong answer!" and shot shinsou and then izuku was like "bestie idk what to tell u i mean CANT" and then she shot him and was like "ok next time then lolz"

Chapter Notes

me when i update TWICE IN A ROW does anyone remember when that was normal?
no just me?

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“Midoriya, I’m leaving this up to you,” Miura says. It’s the first thing Izuku hears when he comes back to his body, even before the rushing of the blood in his ears and the sound of his own ragged, desperate breathing, but even knowing that he’s reset far enough back that everyone’s probably still alive isn’t enough. Izuku drops to his knees. He doesn’t really register any pain at the impact against the concrete, but he knows that it *should* hurt, at least as much as the pain in his chest and throat. It doesn’t, though, not even close.

“Midoriya!” Shinsou hisses, surprise and concern clear in his voice. Izuku shakes his head, reaching both hands up to grasp at his throat. He feels a hand touch his shoulder, warm and comforting because it reminds him that Shinsou’s still alive. It doesn’t help *enough* though, because Izuku’s used to thinking through panic at this point, and it means he’s fully aware of the situation he’s in.

Izuku didn’t *do* anything. He didn’t make any mistakes--he didn’t even make any *decisions*. There wasn’t any opportunity to escape, to fight back. When Shinsou did, Sasaki stopped him, easily, and it didn’t even slow her down. Izuku’s not even going to be at the scene of most of the damage, where Threadbare and July are. He’s not going to be able to stop that. He could *maybe* destroy the laptop, could *maybe* try to stop Sasaki from broadcasting, but he isn’t stupid. He doesn’t think he could beat her in a fight, not even if it was him and Shinsou against her. Her quirk is too powerful--a dose of Fury’s quirk from her or a concussion or a broken leg or *anything* like that, and they’re both out of commission.

Izuku can’t breathe. He remembers the carnage in Tokyo, remembers Void talking about *July finishing up* before the first livestream. He wonders how many craters there already are. He wonders if there’s any way to stop what’s going to happen in the morning, any way at all. He can’t see one if there is.

“Midoriya, look at me,” Miura says, urgently. Izuku shakes his head. He hears Shinsou say something to Miura above him, hears Miura reply, but he can’t make out the words. He can only

hear his heartbeat, too strong and too fast. He's going to die. Not now, not from this--but tomorrow. He's going to die, because Sasaki doesn't *get it* . He *can't* give her what she wants.

Sasaki's quirk needs him to activate his. His only activates when he dies, which would be *fine* , Izuku would be okay with dying to save everyone else if he was certain it *would* , except his quirk *turns back time* and he can't turn it off. Izuku can't activate his quirk and have her keep his memory, not on purpose, anyway. Not unless she had a copycat quirk like Neito. If she gets the memory, time will rewind to before she had it, always, every time. Izuku can die to her hand over and over, and it won't matter. Izuku's had people remember pieces, vague fragments of bloody bathrooms and fear, but not *complete death* . Izuku knows it wouldn't be enough. He knows he can't do it, even if he really, really wanted to.

"*Izuku*," Shinsou hisses. Izuku looks up. Shinsou doesn't call him by his given name. He's crouched in front of Izuku, and when Izuku looks up, lifting his head from his hands (when had he buried his face in his palms like that?), Shinsou reaches out, placing his hands on Izuku's tear stained cheeks.

"Can you reply to me?" Shinsou asks, more of an order than a question. Izuku swallows.

"Y-Yeah," he breathes, and Shinsou's quirk slips over him like a warm coat being draped over his shoulders.

"Calm down," Shinsou orders. "Breathe normally," he adds. Izuku's body complied, and he feels the panic leave him. He seems to be exhausted from panicking or resetting or both, because he collapses forward into Shinsou's arms as the quirk is released. Izuku doesn't have it in him to feel embarrassed, not even as Shinsou gives him a quick, awkward squeeze before helping him back into a sitting position.

"What happened?" Miura asks, her brows drawn. Izuku looks up, swallowing. She's sitting, her knees folded neatly under her. She looks deeply concerned for Izuku, and her bottom lip is bitten at. Izuku wonders how long he was thinking and panicking. He wonders what it looked like, to them.

"I--my quirk, it--I know what Sasaki's going to do," Izuku says. His voice is shaky, rough, and Shinsou frowns. He reaches out for Izuku, but pulls his hand back, like he thinks better of it.

"Your quirk?" Miura echoes. She sighs, shaking her head. "What is it?" she asks instead. Izuku swallows.

"Sasaki--she's going to destroy Tokyo," Izuku says. His voice is small and quiet. It sounds like it might break in the tension of the room. "And--and then she's going to kill--she's going to kill Sh-Shinsou. And then m-me." Izuku swallows.

"What?" Shinsou asks. "Why?" He sounds dumbfounded.

"I--" Izuku cuts himself off. He swallows, shaking his head as he stares down at the concrete.

"That doesn't make any sense," Miura says quietly. "Why would she...?"

"You're right," Shinsou says, frustration clear in his voice. "It doesn't. Why would she go to all this trouble just to kill us? It doesn't add up."

"That's--that's just what I saw," Izuku says weakly. Shinsou's gaze fixes on him, too sharp. Izuku feels like he's burning under it, but he's distracted when Miura suddenly stands up, her hands clenched into fists at her sides.

"I've been here too long," she says, her voice tight. "I--I'm sorry, Midoriya. Shinsou. I need to go," she says, before turning on her heels. She starts to walk quickly.

"Miura, wait--" Izuku starts, cutting himself off as the door opens, letting in golden light. He doesn't dare speak when it's open, not willing to give them away. He waits, something hopeless and cruel blossoming in his chest. He wonders if this is what death row prisoners feel like.

"Midoriya," Shinsou says when the door closes. Izuku turns to look at him where he's still crouched beside Izuku. "You okay?" His brows are creased. Izuku swallows. He can feel a lump in his throat, can feel how fragile he is, like he might break at any moment, but...

"Y-yeah," Izuku says. He doesn't have time to be freaking out right now. They don't have very long to figure out what they need to do. Shinsou nods before leaning back, sitting down properly. He pulls his legs into a criss cross position, regarding Izuku with narrowed eyes.

"Your quirk, huh?" Shinsou asks. Izuku blinks, but Shinsou continues. "I thought it only activates when you're in grave danger."

Izuku swallows. "I--" He pauses, thinking. "I guess the--the situation itself is--is enough?" The answer sounds weak, even to himself. Shinsou's brows remain furrowed.

"Hm," he grunts. He doesn't sound convinced, but he doesn't ask again, and he doesn't activate his quirk on Izuku, so Izuku supposes it's okay. Izuku takes a deep breath. He shuts his eyes, tries to steady himself. It works just a bit to calm himself, but it does nothing to address the real problem.

Izuku has no idea how to solve this.

--

Izuku and Shinsou take turns sleeping throughout the night. Izuku doesn't want to sleep at all, to be honest, but he doesn't want to know how poorly things would go if they didn't have *any* rest at all.

They don't have any way of keeping time either, though, so they just kind of stay up until it feels like it's been about an hour or so and then they wake the other up and switch. It's not the best system--Izuku tries to stay up longer when he can, so that Shinsou can get more rest, and he's almost certain Shinsou is doing the same for him.

It's after Izuku's slept twice and part way through Shinsou's second time sleeping when it happens. Probably about three to five hours since Miura came by, if Izuku had to guess, but he can't be sure--it's impossible to know, really. All he *does* know is that he's sitting cross-legged on the floor by the bars of the cell, tracing patterns in the dust on the concrete while Shinsou breathes softly, when a low rumble starts.

It's hard to tell where it's coming from, at first. Izuku isn't even sure it's anything real, or if he's just imagining it, except it rapidly goes from a small rumble to a shaking and rattling that wracks the whole cell.

"Shinsou!" Izuku shouts, but when he glances over, Shinsou is already waking up, pushing himself up from the concrete. Izuku's mind is spinning--he has no idea why this is happening, no idea *what* is happening.

"An earthquake?" Shinsou asks, incredulously. It's the only thing that makes sense, except Izuku knows it can't be the case. It didn't happen last time.

"It--it shouldn't be happening," Izuku says, having to raise his voice over the noise as the walls

creak and crack around them. Izuku gets to his feet, nervously glancing up. There are creeping, dark fissures in the ceiling, moving towards the center of the room, spreading out from the walls. Izuku swallows.

“It wasn’t in your vision?” Shinsou asks, confusion and alarm in his voice. Izuku shakes his head, gasping as the entire room rocks violently. He loses his footing suddenly, almost falling to the floor, but a warm hand reaches out and grasps him by the upper arm, hauling him back to his feet.

There’s a loud *crack*, and when Izuku whips around in alarm, almost backing into Shinsou, he sees the metal bar portion of the cage has broken open, one portion of it twisted outward. There’s a large chunk of the concrete ceiling dipping dangerously inward, supported only by the metal bars, which are bending and compressing under the weight. Dust falls from the ceiling, and the pale blue light that had been illuminating the room starts to flicker off and on as the power supply is disrupted by the shaking.

“We need to get out of here,” Shinsou says. His gaze flickers over to Izuku. “I don’t know about you, but I’m not going to look a gift horse in the mouth.” He’s still gripping onto Izuku’s arm, probably a good thing with how the room is still violently shaking. Izuku nods quickly, swallowing his fear, and he lets Shinsou tug the two of them out of the cell and into the damaged room of cells.

Once they’re out of their cell, Izuku can see the door that leads to the long hallway they’ve had to walk through numerous times on the way to the camera room. With the way the ground is still shaking and rumbling, it’s hard to walk, but at least the door is open--not that Izuku can ever recall hearing anyone unlock it. Shinsou lets go of Izuku’s arm as they reach the door, which seems to no longer fit properly within its frame. Strangely, the door is held open, like it’s being pulled by a magnet, and the lead door seems like it’s trying to come off of its hinges and fly further into the facility, but it’s firmly locked in place for the moment.

“Leadfoot?” Shinsou asks, jerking his head to the door as they climb through the doorway into the dark hallway. The lights in here seem to be off. Izuku’s not sure if it’s because of the damage from the earthquake or if they were turned off before, but he also can’t see any kind of light switch, so he has to assume they have no choice but to deal with it.

“I don’t know,” Izuku replies, swallowing. Shinsou nods quickly. Izuku feels uneasy as they move down the dark hallway, their shadows stretching long and dark in front of them. The only light is the pale, flickering light from the room with the cells in it, but as their eyes adjust, they’re able to see well enough to avoid the collapsed pieces of the ceiling on the floor.

Slowly, the rumbling seems to stop. There are little aftershocks, tiny rumbles like the ground is settling, but whatever was happening seems to be over for the most part. It feels odd, moving so cautiously now that the ground is still, but Izuku and Shinsou seem to have wordlessly decided that being careful is for the best.

That’s probably why they’re both moving quietly enough to hear the footsteps before whoever is on the other end of the hallway hears *them*. It’s a small noise, a tiny scrape of a shoe against sand or rock on tile; Izuku hears it, and he freezes, goes stiff. Beside him, Shinsou does the same, and just moments later, they see a sweep of a flashlight at the far end of the hallway, where the other door seems to be open like the first one had been.

Someone’s searching the rooms, Izuku realizes, glancing to Shinsou. Shinsou bites his lower lip before moving, slowly and silently, so that he’s against the wall of the hallway. They’re still a straight shot from the doorway--if the mysterious person looks down this hall, they’ll be spotted instantly--but they’ll be harder to see in someone’s peripheral vision, this way.

Shinsou leads, starting to creep forward slowly along the wall. Izuku feels bad that he's not taking more of an active role here, but he doesn't have it in him to feel *that* bad. There's an exhaustion deep in his bones right now that makes it hard for him to feel too bad about letting Shinsou help him out, and, well, if Shinsou gets hurt, Izuku will just make sure to do this again. Izuku is relieved, if anything. He has no idea what changed between this time and last, but whatever it is, it may have stopped Sasaki's plans.

They inch along the hall, creeping closer and closer to the doorway. Izuku can hear the movement of whoever it is in the next room over--it just sounds like one person, unless there's someone else who's trying to be quiet for whatever reason. They're not talking or anything, but Izuku can hear the occasional frustrated hiss or curse. It's a female voice, he realizes, but not an overly familiar one, so probably not Manami, Miura, or Sasaki. He'd recognize one of those three right off the bat.

By the time they reach the doorway, Izuku knows it's only a matter of time before they're noticed. That's why he doesn't startle when the flashlight points directly at them and the person holding it steps into view of the light. Izuku's blinded momentarily by the light, but when his vision adjusted, he realizes it's Void--her hair is all down instead of the usual half-up style, and she's in a nightgown and slippers, but it's undeniably her. She's got a flashlight in one hand and a pistol in the other, but she seems surprised to see them, her brown eyes shooting open. She jerks back, fumbling with the gun as she steps back into a fighting stance, dropping the flashlight.

"Sh-Shinsou!" Izuku hisses, darting out of the hallway and into the main room as the flashlight clatters to the ground and Void flicks at the safety of her gun. He's really glad she seems caught off guard--it gives him and Shinsou enough of a chance to get out of the tight hallway and into the larger space. Izuku flinches at the sound of two shots, the bullets burying themselves into the wall harmlessly.

"What the hell did you do?" Void demands, her voice almost a snarl. Strangely, it's directed at Shinsou. Izuku blinks, feeling his brows draw together. Shinsou seems as confused as Izuku is, though, and they don't really have any time to worry about it. Izuku moves forward at Void, using her momentary distraction to try and disarm her.

"Shit," Void hisses, and she tries to raise the gun as Izuku slams his shoulder into her. She fires a shot into the ground, the sound echoing in Izuku's ears. She doesn't drop the gun, but Izuku will settle for not being shot. He stomps downward, on her slippered feet, feeling satisfaction when she hisses.

"What do you mean 'what did I do?'" Shinsou asks, moving in and knocking her arm away as she raises her gun arm again. She shoots, and Izuku hears Shinsou hiss in pain. Izuku bites at his lip, turning, but it looks like she's just grazed the outside of his shoulder, barely scraping the skin at all.

Void doesn't seem like she's going to fall for Shinsou's attempt to get her to answer, and even as Izuku raises his knee to hit at her stomach, she seems to be rapidly recovering from her initial surprise. Izuku can tell that their upper hand in the fight won't last much longer, and he grits his teeth as she dodges his knee strike, stepping back.

She's out of both Shinsou and Izuku's range to hit her without a weapon when she raises the gun next, aimed at Izuku's chest. Izuku steps back, preparing to duck and roll, but he knows that, at this range, it's not going to be nearly fast enough. He grits his teeth, bracing for pain, but just before he hears the gun fire, there's another rumbling, a strong, intense shaking of the building, and the gun and bullet both go flying *up*.

Izuku watches, dumbfounded, as the gun, the bullet, and the bullets that had embedded themselves in the floor all shoot upwards, pinning themselves to the ceiling. There's a faint violet glow around them, and Izuku has to tear his gaze away from the ceiling to rush forward. He knows a chance when he sees one--and he doesn't know how long this will last. Void is distracted by her gun defying gravity, and Izuku uses that chance, punching her *hard* in the jaw, upwards and to the side. She crumples to the ground, hard, and Izuku stares at her for a moment before realizing that she isn't getting up.

"I think she's down for a while," Shinsou says.

"Y-Yeah," Izuku says, swallowing. "We should--we should get going." Izuku turns away from Void's unconscious form. The ground is shaking, but not as hard as it had the first time. The gun and bullets seem firmly locked on the ceiling, though, which is too high for Izuku to reach; otherwise, he'd try to grab the gun. Instead, he leans down and picks up the flashlight, angling it forwards, towards where he thinks they entered the facility from.

"It's got to be Leadfoot, right?" Shinsou asks as they start to move through the large room. Izuku nods sharply, swallowing the lump in his throat. "I didn't realize she was this powerful."

"Me neither," Izuku says quietly. "This--this wasn't what happened before, so I don't know what's going to happen," he says. "We should be careful."

"I always am," Shinsou remarks dryly. "What do you mean, what happened before?" Izuku swallows. Shinsou's gaze is only on him for a short moment, but Izuku still feels like he's being stared at even as they pick their way forward.

Izuku's saved having to answer Shinsou's question, though, when the golden beam of the flashlight lands on a pile of collapsed concrete and stone. There's a mess of glowing violet rock pinned upward blocking the upper half of the room here, and the lower half is filled with normal rubble. Izuku realizes, abruptly, what had caused the earthquake.

"In--in one of the memories, Miura told Sasaki there was a lot of lead *ore* here," Izuku says. "She--she must have--"

"She can control that too?" Shinsou asks, incredulous, but Izuku doesn't think he needs to answer. Under the purple glow of her quirk, the rock looks like it's a dark grey, slightly metallic--nothing exciting, really. But Izuku can clearly see the difference from the rock it had been surrounded by, and not just from the fact that the ore is stuck to the ceiling, pulling against it like it's trying to burst through to the surface and the normal rock is piled on the floor.

"We can't get out this way," Izuku breathes. It settles in his stomach like a stone. He's pretty sure the exit was in this direction, which means that they're going to have to hope that there's another exit to this base, another exit that *isn't* destroyed like this one.

"We'd better hurry," Shinsou mutters. "I don't want to be here when this place collapses for real." Izuku swallows. Shinsou's not being dramatic, unfortunately--Izuku can see the cracks in the walls and ceiling, worse in some places than others. They're growing, the ground around them creaking and moaning under pressure. Izuku isn't sure how much of it is due to Miura pulling at the lead, moving it upward for whatever reason, or if it's because of the damage that's already been done, but either way, they can't have a lot of time left.

"R-Right," Izuku says, and he turns, shining the flashlight around. The doors are no longer pinned open like the doors are magnetized, but they're still open enough. It looks like the doors are staining, trying to pull upwards too, but stuck by the hinges. Izuku swallows, choosing a door that

he hasn't gone down.

"I--I don't know where I'm going," Izuku says, as if there's any way Shinsou doesn't know that already. Shinsou just grunts as Izuku starts off in that direction, moving as quickly as he can without tripping over the broken chunks of concrete on the ground. The tiled floor is uneven, now, rippled up in places and cracked down in others. It's strange--this place had looked old fashioned before, sure, but not *ruined*. Now, it looks like it's been bombed, almost. The thought of a bomb puts a sick taste in Izuku's mouth, though, so he dismisses it and keeps moving.

The first door is a bust--Izuku can see that the hallway ends almost immediately in a pile of rubble. Izuku swallows, moving on to the next one, shining the yellow beam of the flashlight down the corridor. It's not promising, exactly, but it isn't collapsed, either--there's a long hallway that branches off to the left every so often. Other than that, it's entirely plain, like the rest of them have been.

"Let's go," Shinsou murmurs. Izuku can hear the anxiety in his voice, and he doesn't blame him. Izuku leads the way, using the light to illuminate the way. He wishes he would be able to see without it--he knows that, if there's someone else down the hallway, the light will give them away the same way it gave Void away to them. There's not much of an option, though, unless they want to go blind.

As they're moving, the rumbling of the ground changes. It grows louder, just for a moment, like something heavy has hit the ground, and then it nearly stops. There's the sounds of things settling, like before, but no new movement. Izuku swallows, uneasy. He glances back at Shinsou, who's biting at his lower lip.

"Keep moving," he says. His voice is near silent. Izuku nods, turning to face forward. When he turns, though, there's a moment when the flashlight's angled down by mistake. It's just a second, but Izuku sees something odd.

"W-Wait," he says, holding a hand up and stopping. Shinsou stops, his body almost pressed to Izuku's. Izuku switches off the light.

"What are you--" Shinsou starts, cutting himself off when he sees it too. Up ahead, down one of the hallways attached to this one, there's light leaking through. It's dim, though, a dove-grey. It looks almost like the light of dawn.

"That one," Izuku says, tucking the flashlight into his pocket. As his eyes start to adjust to the darkness once more, there's enough ambient light from whatever's up ahead that he's able to navigate. This hall is mostly clear, anyway--there must not have been much lead in the surrounding rock, or something. Izuku can hear Shinsou following behind him, his breaths echoing in the near silence of the hallway. The only sounds other than their breathing and footsteps are the protests of the base as the walls shift and dust falls. Even without fresh movement, it's too unstable to be still, it seems.

Izuku thinks he can feel his heartbeat picking up in his chest as the light grows brighter. There's no denying that it's natural light, at this point--Izuku's wondering how he thought the light in the cell was close at *all*, really. This is so different, so much brighter and cleaner. It's the sharp, clean grey that comes from the sun rising to a horizon full of storm clouds. It's a sunrise to the kind of weather he'd seen in the video, last time.

It also means they'd slept in a little more than Izuku had thought, but Izuku had been *watching* when July destroyed so much of the city last time, so he just has to hope that *that's* not what this is. He's okay with some destruction, as long as it's not... not *that*. Izuku doesn't think he'll ever forget

the sight of the bodies dropping, the sight of the city being ripped to shreds in front of his eyes.

They turn down the hallway with the light coming from it. It's almost blinding--the opening to the outside is *right here*. It's clear how the base had been ripped open, now that they're here. There are stairs, what looks to have once been clean, white marble, going upward. At the top, there's something dark silhouetted against the bright grey sky. Izuku can still see the skyline intact, which he takes as a good sign.

"What *happened*?" Shinsou asks as they jog up the stairs. Izuku has to wonder the same thing. Around them, the ground looks like an open maw--like something had burst out from within, angry and pressurized and wanting *out*. There's twisted iron rebar pointed upward, at the sky, rock and rubble scattered all around. Izuku can hear sirens in the distance, shouting too, but nothing right here.

Izuku's eyes are still adjusting to the light. They must be facing east--the clouds just ahead of them are too bright for it to be anyway else. It's why the only thing Izuku sees at first is red-orange hair, long strands of it atop the rubble. He's confused, at first, because he sees the blood, next. The pile of rock and concrete and lead ore is still backlit--he can't really see it until he's right there.

In front of him, atop the rubble, are two bodies, one on top of the other. The one on bottom is more immediately recognizable, because she's face up, eyes still open and her bright red pigtails spread out on either side of her. Manami stares up at the sky, just past Izuku, a dull, dry look to her eyes. There's blood all around her, but her face and head are untouched, and wherever she's injured is covered by the body lying over her stomach and chest. She's holding hands with the person on top of her, their pale fingers interlocked and loose. Beside them, on the ground, is a baseball bat.

It takes Izuku a moment to recognize Miura's corpse. She's face down, wearing the same things she had been last night. What gives it away is her hair--Izuku's seen her in various outfits, in disguises and street clothes, but she never changes her thick, black hair. It's matted with blood. There is no gun, no bullet that Izuku can see, but she's very clearly been shot through the head. Izuku takes a step back, almost falling down the stairs, but Shinsou catches him, wrapping an arm around Izuku's waist. Shinsou says something, but Izuku doesn't hear it.

Miura's fingers are bruised from her lead rings. She's not carrying a gun, but Izuku sees the case she uses to carry lead ball bearings when she fights. Manami doesn't use a gun, either, and from what Izuku can tell, there are none nearby. Izuku knows what happened. He thinks about these things so often, there's no way he'd miss it now.

"She killed herself," Izuku says, and this time he processes when Shinsou chokes out,

"*What?*" his voice shocked. "What--why would she--"

"I don't--I don't know," Izuku answers, shaking his head. "I don't--I don't understand," he says, his brow furrowing. "This doesn't make any *sense*," he says, stepping forward, away from Shinsou's grip where the other boy is keeping him from falling down the stairs. Izuku moves, even though he doesn't want to, and he puts a hand on Miura's shoulder. She's still warm as he turns her over, off of Manami's body.

Manami's stomach is full of lead ball bearings. Izuku swallows. He can taste blood in his mouth, but he isn't sure if he bit his tongue or if it's from the strong smell of the stuff in the air.

"Oh," Shinsou says. "She--they're practically sisters, aren't they?" he asks, voice small. Izuku nods. He's too choked up to say anything.

“I don’t--did Manami try to stop her?” Izuku asks, shaking his head. He ghosts his fingers just above the carnage that is Manami’s torso. “And Miura had to--”

“She had to kill her?” Shinsou finishes. “I don’t know.” He stares at them, then frowns, looking up. “Izuku, what’s--”

He’s cut off by a horrible noise. Izuku has a chance to look upward as he hears what he thinks is a shotgun going off right by his ears, except when he looks up he sees a helicopter with two familiar figures on it and a blazing light. A second passes, and the shotgun’s blast sound is replaced by a horrific roar. Izuku doesn’t have a chance to react, doesn’t have a chance to dodge or try to find shelter--there’s no time at all to dodge or run. When the blast hits, it’s just intense, bright heat, and then he’s gone.

Chapter End Notes

content warning: graphic dead bodies, i think someone puked idk, uhh panic attack

hahah lolz anyone else confused as shit or is that just izuku and shinsou

[discord!](#) [blnt carrd!](#) [personal carrd!](#)

staircase

Chapter Summary

last time: izuku tells miura and shinsou that sasaki gonna go nutzo but then ?? there's an earthquake and the facility busts open, they fight void who is like ?? hsinsou what tf and they find ded miura and manami fucking wild

Chapter Notes

ngl i feel like this chapter hot garbage but here u go my beloveds

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Izuku's mind is still processing the image of Miura and Manami's dead bodies when he comes back to himself staring at Miura, in her oversized black shirt and leggings, staring at him serious and calm and trusting. She's watching him through the bars of the cell, her face dark but very much alive, and she says,

"Midoriya, I'm leaving this up to you," and it feels like a punch to the gut because she *doesn't*, not if he tells her about Sasaki's plans. Izuku doesn't doubt her loyalty to him, doesn't doubt that she intends to help him and Shinsou, but the fact of the matter is, Miura did *not* leave it up to him. She did... *something*, without telling him, and it ended in all three of them and Manami, dead.

"Midoriya?" Shinsou asks, voice hesitant. Izuku swallows. He realizes he's been silent for too long for it to not be a little concerning, but at least he's not fully panicking this time around. He takes a deep breath, wiping his sweaty palms on the front of his pants.

"Do you--do you trust me?" Izuku asks Miura. Miura frowns, leaning back slightly like she's been struck by his words.

"Isn't that what I just said?" she asks. Izuku shakes his head.

"No, I mean--you're choosing us over the Gekkeiju, I get that," Izuku says. "But do you really trust that I can--that I can get us out of here? If I told you that--that my quirk showed me Sasaki was planning to kill me and Shinsou, would you really wait for my plan? Or would you--would you act alone?"

Miura stares at him. It's obvious, in this lighting and with the clothes that she's wearing, that her eyes are not *actually* violet at all. They're just brown--the purple only comes from her quirk. Right now, she does not look like the villain Leadfoot. She does not look like the lieutenant to the Gekkeiju. She does not look like the fighter who collapsed the whole base by ripping out the innards of the earth itself, but Izuku is fully aware of just how dangerous she is. The memory of her and Manami, hand in hand, won't let him forget, even if Miura looks like the girl from the hardware store right now, more than anything.

"You already know the answer to that question," Miura says, after a long moment, sighing and

shutting her eyes. She opens them after a heartbeat, dropping her gaze to the floor.

“I get why you’re a lieutenant now,” Izuku replies, softly. Miura nods, jerkily. Shinsou makes a noise in his throat.

“What on earth are you talking about?” he asks. Izuku swallows, glancing over to where Shinsou is staring at him with furrowed brows.

“My quirk,” he says. “I-I saw a future that... it ends poorly.” He turns his gaze back to Miura. “If you destroy the base alone, we all die. If we do nothing, Sasaki destroys Tokyo and kills Shinsou, then me.”

“She--” Shinsou starts, but Izuku cuts him off.

“I know, it--it doesn’t make sense, it doesn’t add up, but--but we don’t have *time* to worry about her motives,” he says, speaking quickly as he watches Shinsou’s mouth press into a thin line. “We need to work together, this time,” he says, directing that to Miura. “You can’t--you can’t do it alone, it doesn’t work.” Miura opens her mouth. She closes it, seeming to think, then she nods.

“Okay,” she says with a little sigh. “I--you know, if she kills you, I don’t think there’s anything holding her back,” Miura says, looking to the side, her face twisted with discomfort. “It *doesn’t* make sense, but... we have to do everything we can, to prevent that from happening.”

“Does your quirk only show you futures that end in your death?” Shinsou asks. There’s a frown on his face, when Izuku looks over to him. Izuku isn’t sure if that’s part of what he’d told to Shinsou, specifically, but it’s certainly part of what he’d *considered* telling people as part of the lie about Mulligan. Izuku’s honestly so confused about what actually happened and what got erased with resets at this point that he can’t recall, but he nods, hesitantly.

“It--yeah, it only shows the bad outcomes,” Izuku confirms. Shinsou nods, but his frown doesn’t disappear.

“So we know what *not* to do, at least,” he says. He doesn’t sound happy about it. Izuku swallows. He takes a deep breath, then turns back to Miura.

“Before dawn, tomorrow, can you--can you come and let us out?” he asks. Miura blinks, looking surprised, but Izuku presses on. “I know you--you’re considering just destroying the whole base, right? Um, I think--I think that’s still probably the best way out, because it created confusion last time--when I saw it with my quirk.” Izuku pauses, clenching his hands together. “So we could use that to--to our advantage.”

“She can do that?” Shinsou asks. Miura nods hesitantly.

“I can manipulate galena too,” she says. “Lead ore, that is. There’s a lot here,” she says, reaching up to fiddle with a piece of her hair. “It’s why we originally chose the location. Maiko was considering causing an earthquake, as a part of her debut in Japan.”

“So you did that in one of the futures Midoriya saw,” Shinsou says, his eyes moving over to Izuku. “But how did you activate your quirk? You have to be in danger, don’t you?” There’s an accusing undertone to his voice that Izuku doesn’t like, and Izuku’s reminded of this same line of questioning, from last time around. Izuku swallows.

“Um, I--I think the situation we’re in counts, doesn’t it?” Izuku says chuckling nervously. Shinsou’s eyes narrow.

“How many futures do you see anyway?” he asks. Izuku glances down, fiddling with a loose string on his pants. He can feel Miura watching him, more with curiosity than anything.

“It--it depends,” Izuku says. “I get more side effects the more I--the more I see,” he says. “But just two, this time around.”

“Wait,” Miura interrupts, cutting Shinsou off just as he opens his mouth to speak. “You said she destroys Tokyo,” she says, a troubled expression on her face. “Was that... was that me?”

Izuku shakes his head. “No, it--it was July. She and Threadbare, they were on a helicopter, and she--she shot some kind of quirk beam from her mouth, and it--it destroyed *so much* .”

Miura stares at him. “Oh,” she says. “I should go get ready,” she says, standing up. “I--I’ll be back in the morning,” she adds, glancing back at them. “Okay?”

“O-Okay,” Izuku says. Shinsou’s watching him, not Miura. “You--do you know anything about July’s quirk?”

“Just that it’s a weapon of mass destruction,” she says, shaking her head. “I didn’t realize it was that bad,” she says, turning and walking towards the door. Her hair whips behind her as she moves, and Izuku is struck with the image of it matted with blood once again. He swallows as she disappears from view. He hopes, desperately, that he doesn’t have to see her die again.

--

When Miura comes back, they’re both awake. They’d slept, of course, but only in fitful little pieces--they’d both been too nervous to do much else. Izuku doesn’t think that Shinsou is really over the whole tattling-on-him thing, or there’s something else going on, because he’s seemed distant, cold. Izuku doesn’t really have the time to deal with it right now, though. They have more pressing matters.

Miura’s clearly better prepared, this time around. She’s wearing most of her villain costume, with her lead boots and the pouch that carries the lead balls she uses like bullets. Strangely, though, she’s not wearing the usual suite of rings around her legs and arms that Izuku’s pretty sure helps her to fly with her quirk or her mask. She also has a backpack on, and when she approaches Izuku and Shinsou’s cell, she swings it off of her shoulders, unzipping it as she stops in front of the cell.

“I brought your weapons,” Miura says, her voice quiet. “No guns, though,” she adds, pulling Izuku’s belt, laden with knives, out of the bag and passing it through the bars of the cell. “I can’t be as selective with my quirk when I’m targeting such a large area, so they’d be useless anyway.” Izuku nods, swallowing. He remembers what had happened to Void’s gun, how it’d ended up just glued to the ceiling. *Miura must have still been alive, at that point* .

Izuku accepts his belt, fastening it at his hip while Miura hands Shinsou two sheathed knives. Shinsou accepts them with a nod, regarding Miura suspiciously.

“Are you going to let us out?” he asks. Miura nods, not seeming surprised.

“Yes,” she says, reaching a hand into the pocket of her pants. She pulls out the key, sliding it into the lock of the cell and opening it up. Izuku swallows. It feels too easy--just like last time, they can simply *walk* out of the cell. Izuku isn’t sure what it says about him, that he feels like he should have to fight for that. It doesn’t feel right to just be able to leave without any fanfare.

“I also brought more food,” she says, looking down. “I don’t know if--if you need it, but I’d imagine things are going to get rough,” she says, reaching into the backpack again and producing

two granola bars. “This is all I could take without risking waking someone,” she says. Izuku blinks, reaching out and taking them. He passes one to Shinsou, who gives him a quick nod.

“Probably smart,” Shinsou says. He looks to the opening of the cell, then pushes past Izuku, into the hallway. “We should get going,” he says, unwrapping one end of his granola bar and taking a bite. He chews on it as he looks back at Izuku, one eyebrow raised as if in a challenge. Izuku swallows, taking a step outside of the cell as well. Miura doesn’t seem to notice the strange tension between the two of them as she pulls Izuku’s arm sheathes out of her bag.

“Th-thanks,” Izuku says as she passes them to him. She just nods, reaching into her bag and pulling out loops of familiar fabric. *Shinsou’s capture weapon?* Izuku hasn’t seen it in a long time, not since the provisional license exam.

“This was with the weapons,” Miura says, glancing up at Shinsou. “It’s yours, isn’t it?” Now that Izuku’s looking at it closer, the capture weapon is thinner than Aizawa’s, shorter too. *It’d be easier to conceal*, Izuku thinks.

Shinsou nods. “It is, yeah.” He reaches out, taking it from her. Izuku watches as he lifts his shirt, before loosely wrapping it around his waist like a belt. Izuku blinks. When Shinsou drops the shirt back down, it’s practically invisible. Izuku hadn’t really been paying close attention, when Fury had disarmed Shinsou—he’d been too busy handing over his knives to Manami. Fury must have known about it, though, otherwise Shinsou likely wouldn’t have had to give up the capture weapon in the first place.

“That’s everything,” Miura says. Izuku nods, swallowing. It’s a leg above anything he’s had before, that’s for sure, but it doesn’t help to stop the anxiety building in his gut. Even if they make it out without running into anyone or they fight off whoever they *do* run into, there’s still July. Izuku doesn’t know what to do after they get out, and even then, there’s no guarantee they’ll get out in the first place.

“What time is it?” Izuku asks. Miura glances back at him.

“About five in the morning,” she says. “Dawn should be in an hour, give or take.” Izuku swallows, nods. It should be enough time, if this goes well.

Miura leads them forward, this time. It’s quiet, unlike when Shinsou and Izuku had escaped through the broken cell. The Tokyo base is unlike other buildings in that there is very little sound. If Izuku was at his dorm, he’d be able to hear crickets chirping or the rustling of the wind outside. If he was home with his mom, he’d be able to hear some traffic, maybe some cicadas or some birds depending on the time. At the Gekkeiju tower in Musutafu, he could hear traffic, the buzz of the city, the occasional honk of a horn.

Underground, though, all Izuku can hear is his own breath and the footsteps of him and his companions. Miura’s lead shoes make a distinct, metallic sound against the floor, but both Shinsou and Izuku are near silent in their ordinary shoes. There’s a slight hum, if Izuku listens, that might be the electricity or heating or something like that, but aside from those sounds, it’s too quiet. Izuku thinks he might even be able to hear his heartbeat in his ears, thump-thumping against the eardrum. The sound grows faster as he grows more and more anxious, as they creep down the hall that led to the cells and through the main room.

There’s nobody there, but they’re quiet anyway. Miura gestures forward, not towards the hallway they’d entered from, but at a familiar hallway. Izuku feels his heart sink in his chest. It’s the hall he and Shinsou had followed to find Miura and Manami’s bodies. *There’s no reason to think they’ll die this time*, Izuku tells himself. *This time is different*.

Shinsou, of course, sees no problem with this. He and Miura are already moving forward--if Izuku wanted to have an issue with this route, he would have had to bring it up back in the cell, where they weren't trying to be quiet. Izuku pushes down the instinct that says going this way is a *bad idea* --of course he thinks that, he just died this way. He follows Miura quietly as she leads them down the dimly lit hallway.

It's significantly faster with the lights on and no earthquake. The lights are dimmed for the night, but the dull orange glow is more than enough for them to navigate by. It has the effect of dyeing everything a strange, eerie color though, and Izuku finds himself wondering if the choice of lighting was intentional. It seems like the sort of thing Sasaki would do, for sure. The combination with Shinsou's violet hair makes him look like he's blonde, almost, and it's odd. Izuku wonders if it's making his hair look black, like when he's in his Ace costume.

When they get to the door that should lead to the stairs, it's shut. Izuku expects Miura to take out a key and unlock it or use her quirk, but to his surprise, she doesn't. She reaches out a hand (bruised, always bruised) and turns the knob. The door opens, and Izuku can't help himself--he looks into the room, expecting to see the outside.

He doesn't. Instead, there's a white marble staircase, polished and beautiful, leading straight up into the ceiling. The room is otherwise empty, the walls smooth, black painted stone. There's no light in the room, either--the only reason they can see inside at all is because of the light leaking in from the open door.

"This doesn't look like an exit," Shinsou whispers dryly. Izuku has to agree, even though he knows more than Shinsou does--he knows that, in other circumstances, this staircase opened right up into a street.

Miura glances at them before stepping into the room, jerking her head as if to indicate that they should do the same. Izuku swallows, then complies. He can feel his pulse thrumming under his skin, but he doesn't think that Miura is going to betray them now--it seems too late for that. Shinsou follows, and Miura shuts the door, plunging them into darkness.

"It's an exit only I can use," Miura says, her voice barely above a whisper. "There's a lead plate in the road above us, which I can rip open using my quirk, but it's big enough that I can't really be selective," she says. "So I can't be subtle."

"So it'll--it'll cause an earthquake?" Izuku asks. He remembers when everything had shot *upward*, last time. Miura nods.

"Right. Once we're out, I can disrupt as much lead in the area as I can without causing damage to surface buildings, and then we can run. I don't know if it'll buy us *enough* time, but it'll give us some, and I don't think Maiko will have told Void, Threadbare, or July about this exit," Miura explains. Izuku can't see her, but he can hear the grim expression in her voice.

"But Manami and Fury would know," Shinsou says. Izuku swallows.

"They do," Miura confirms. "That's why we need to do this now, before anyone notices that we're not where we're supposed to be." With that, Izuku hears a sound like a belt unbuckling. "I can't wear my boots for this. I'll put them back on if we have a chance afterwards, but it's not like the two of you can fly anyway."

Izuku swallows. "So--so this is it, then?" He hears Miura hum softly, then hears what sounds like the boots being set down against the marble stairs.

"I guess so," she says. "You know, Midoriya, when I first saw you in the shop, I didn't think that I'd end up doing *this* for you," she says. Izuku thinks he hears a smile in her words, even as she sighs. "Are you two ready?"

"Y-Yeah," Izuku says. Shinsou just grunts, and then there's a terrible, earsplitting noise from above. The ceiling glows a faint violet, as do Miura's shoes where they'd been placed on the ground. They shoot upward as the ceiling itself bursts open, like a jack-in-the-box exploding open. The sound is impossibly loud, and it's nothing like Izuku imagined--it's far more like a shriek or a yelp than he'd thought splitting metal or rock would make. The cracks and groans come *after*, as Miura continues to activate her quirk, as the light floods into the space, blinding Izuku.

It's so *bright* outside, even though it's before dawn, or maybe it'd just been that dark inside--the pale grey light, interspersed with the gold of street lamps, paints Miura in high contrast. Her hands are extended in front of her, like she's controlling a puppet or reaching out to grab something, but despite the immense amount of metal she's moving and the ground shaking and rippling below them, there is no strain on her face. Her eyes are glowing brilliantly, brighter than Izuku has ever seen--they're practically neon violet, streaked with magenta and indigo--but she doesn't appear to be in any pain. A faint smile rises on her lips as she catches Izuku's gaze, and the rumbling lulls.

"Let's get out of the room and onto the street, then I'll try and do some more damage," she says. There's a confidence in her voice even though it's shaking slightly. Izuku looks at her more closely, but the only signs of strain are a faint sheen of sweat on her forehead and the lingering violet glint in her eyes. Other than that she actually looks *satisfied*. Proud of herself.

"That was... something," Shinsou says, and Izuku nods rapidly. He starts moving out of the little crater where the staircase leads into the base. It's convenient, now, that the staircase had led right up to the ceiling--it means that they only really have to avoid the pieces of broken and cracked asphalt from the road above.

"I haven't done anything like that... ever," Miura says, looking down at her hand, flexing it. "I knew I could, but it's different to do it. Especially for..." She trails off, but Izuku thinks he knows what she's getting at. *Especially for the good guys*, he thinks. He feels a spark of something akin to hope burn in his chest. If he does manage to get out of this, the cat's out of the bag; Sasaki definitely, absolutely knows about him being a spy. There's no reason for him to pretend any more. He can go back to being a hero, full time.

"I hate to be that guy," Shinsou starts, "but I think we're on a time limit, here," he says. He sounds happy, despite his words--Izuku thinks that Shinsou is starting to believe their plan will work, and despite himself, Izuku is, too. Izuku just has to figure out a way past July, now. If this way out of the facility itself is fine, then there's no reason that he can't keep this part of the plan the same, after all.

"Right," Miura says, looking back at them. Izuku and Shinsou are both clear of the staircase at this point, standing at the top of it, just in front of the pile of rubble that must be the non-lead contents of the ground between the staircase and the street. Izuku starts to glance around, looking for the best place to stand while Miura disrupts the rest of the facility, but he's stopped when he sees the blood drain out of Miura's face, hears the sound of a door opening and closing behind them.

"Hi, Sumire," Manami says. Izuku whips around to see her standing at the bottom of the stairs, her hair in its usual pigtails. She's wearing pajamas, a set of matching pants and a long sleeved, button-down fleece shirt. They're both pale pink with hearts on them, and now that Izuku sees her like this, he realizes this is what she'd been wearing last time, as a corpse. Held loosely in her right hand is a metal baseball bat, reflecting a streetlamp somewhere behind Izuku. She's smiling

faintly, almost sadly.

“Manami--” Miura starts, but cuts herself off when Manami pulls the door shut behind her. She’s barefoot, Izuku realizes. She walks over the broken fragments of concrete and marble like it’s soft carpet, though, not seeming to notice as she starts up the stairs. Izuku and Shinsou scramble out of the way, off to the side, so they’re not between the two.

“This is the line for you, isn’t it?” Manami asks, her voice sweet, gentle. Izuku can see as she gets closer that her amber eyes aren’t hearts. Her face is sad, but it’s calmer than Izuku’s ever seen it, even with the small smile on her lips.

“Manami, turn around,” Miura says, her voice tight, choked. “You don’t have to do this, just--just go back inside.” Izuku feels a tug on his sleeve. He turns to see Shinsou in a fighting stance, one knife out. Izuku swallows, arming himself with a knife from his belt. It feels wrong, though. Neither Manami nor Miura seem to care at all that they’re there.

“I do,” Manami says, tipping her head to the side slightly. “I *do have to do this*,” she echoes, laughing slightly, her smiles growing. Her voice sounds strange, but Izuku can’t tell if she’s about to cry or if it’s something else. “You know that I have to, Sumimi.”

“I can’t fight you,” Miura says. Unlike Manami, there’s no ambiguity in her voice. She sounds like she’s in pain, and even if her voice didn’t give it away, her face would. Izuku doesn’t think he’s ever seen her look so *hurt*, not even marred with bruises or as a corpse, lying over Manami’s body. The twisted-up, broken expression on her face makes Izuku’s heart hurt.

“But you’d be okay with killing Kazuo?” Manami asks, moving forward. With each step, the top of the baseball bat drags against the cracked marble, making a grating noise. “Mom and I would be fine, if the base collapsed. We’re strong. But Kazuo wouldn’t, and you know that. Don’t you?”

Miura takes a step back. The piece of concrete she steps on cracks and crumbles, grinding under her shoe. She’s wearing normal sneakers, the ones she wears under her lead boots, Izuku realizes. She can’t use her quirk to fly away from this. *Had she really meant to kill Fury?* He can’t help but wonder. Some part of him hopes Manami’s right.

“I--” Miura starts. Her voice breaks. As Manami gets closer to her, she casts a nervous glance at Shinsou and Izuku. “Manami, he--it’s not right, what he does to people. I can’t be a part of that anymore.” Izuku swallows. It feels like the words are meant for him, as an apology. Izuku doesn’t like that it’s starting to sound like Miura doesn’t plan to make it out of here.

“He had no choice,” Manami says. There’s something firm in her voice, something Izuku doesn’t understand as she reaches down, wraps her left hand over her right. Her smile curls into anger, her face twisting into bitter frustration. Her body ripples with rainbow colors, but the heart in her pupils don’t look fitting. Miura takes another step back, putting herself up onto the pile of rubble.

“He’s had a choice for a long time now,” Miura says. There’s something desperate and terrible about her voice. She reaches down, opening her pouch of lead ball bearings, and then flicks a hand. They spread out, forming a threatening spray, ready to strike. Manami doesn’t seem to even notice, her hands tightening around the baseball bat.

“*I* had no choice!” Manami shouts. She runs forward, swinging with the baseball bat, but her strike is blocked with a mass of flying lead. Miura’s leaning back, out of the way, biting at her lower lip. She glances over to Izuku and Shinsou, mouths *run*. Izuku hesitates, but Shinsou seems to have no such issues--he takes off almost immediately. Izuku looks between Miura and Manami, where each blow carries the low sound of metal-on-metal, and where Shinsou is running, torn.

“You’re not the same as him!” Miura hisses. “You could leave, too. We could both leave.” She ducks to the side, sweat beading on her face

“I’m not leaving Mom,” Manami says. “And you shouldn’t either. She’s given us so much,” she says, swinging the baseball bat up. Izuku watches as it *flattens* the balls of lead it contacts--he can tell the force that she’s using would be enough to seriously injure, if not kill, Miura in just one hit.

“Just because she helped us doesn’t mean we owe her servitude for the rest of our lives,” Miura says. Izuku catches her gaze for a second, and he realizes his presence is distracting her. He realizes it at the exact same second he realizes something horrible--he couldn’t help her with this fight. Unlike most battles, where getting in close with a knife could work in his favor, if Manami touches him, the emotional amplification of her quirk would likely be disabling to him, if his past experience in the tower is any evidence.

It’s also clear now, watching Manami fight Miura, that in his past fights with her, she was holding back. She moves so quickly that Izuku can’t even *see* the bat before it impacts lead or the ground. Miura is barely holding on, just dodging and blocking--Izuku would only get hurt. When Manami’s bat slams into the ground, the cracks it makes in the ground are almost a meter in diameter, and it shakes the ground all the way where Izuku stands. No--Izuku has to run. He shakes his head, cursing the fear burning in his chest, and chases after Shinsou.

I’m going to have to reset, he thinks to himself. He doesn’t want to give up on Miura-- *can’t* give up on Miura, and he finds himself not wanting to give up on Manami, either. Izuku feels frustrated, angry tears build in his eyes, and he scrubs them off as he runs, watching Shinsou’s form up ahead, just a violet blur at this point. He pretends he can’t hear the sounds of metal crashing into metal behind him.

And then the sounds stop. Izuku freezes, almost falling over as he skitters to a stop, turning on his heels to look behind him. He feels horrible when relief blooms in his gut at seeing that Miura is the one standing, her long black hair hanging loosely around her face, but he can’t help it. He thinks, briefly, that maybe this reset is salvageable, after all, and then he looks more closely.

He’s far enough away at this point that he’s spared most of the details, but it’s clear what’s happened. There’s blood, everywhere, and Manami is on the ground at Miura’s feet. Miura is staring dully at the ground in front of her, where the baseball bat is lying, reflecting the quickly lightening sky. Izuku’s stomach drops. He remembers how he found Miura, last time.

“Miura!” he calls, jogging back over to her. At this point, he has no idea where Shinsou is, anyway, and he just has to hope the other boy is okay. He’s distracted enough by the fact that Miura doesn’t even look up at him as he runs up to her and her--sister? Childhood friend? She doesn’t move at all. When Izuku is close enough to see her face, it’s splattered with blood that isn’t hers and there are tears running down her face, leaving teartracks of clean skin.

“Go,” Miura says, her voice quiet and steady. “You need to run, or the others will catch up to you.” Izuku blinks. Miura’s face is blank, despite the tears. Izuku tries his best not to look down at the body, but when he does it’s--it’s clear it was Miura’s quirk. There’s a piece of lead metal, jagged and probably from within the base, stabbed through Manami’s chest from behind, poking out through to the front. It looks like it would have been quick. Manami’s eyes are still open, her face blank.

“You have to--you come too,” Izuku says, hears the begging in his voice. “You’ll die if you stay here.”

“I know,” Miura says, her voice soft. “Leave me.” She doesn’t seem upset, doesn’t seem

heartbroken or bereaved or *anything* Izuku had imagined she would. She simply seems resigned. Izuku opens his mouth to reply, but he hears something familiar that makes his heart sink. When he glances up and sees a helicopter, he sighs.

“We’re both going to die,” he says instead. “July,” he adds when that gets Miura to *finally* look at him, her eyes widening. He gestures up at the sky.

Miura blinks, slow. “At least it’ll be quick,” she says, and it’s the last thing either of them get to say before the sound of July’s quirk swamps out all sound. Izuku shuts his eyes, this time, to block out the blinding light, and he lets himself burn to ashes.

Chapter End Notes

content warning: uh sewerslide, abuse referenced, violence/gore

[discord!](#) [blnt carrd!](#) [personal carrd!](#)

i swear this arc feels SO repetitive but i have to remind myself yall only see each chapter once whereas i see it in the outline, in the draft, when i edit it, every time i skin what i wrote before continuing, etc.

endless

Chapter Summary

last time: they go TOGETHER to get out thru the white stairs except manami still dies
and then july kabooms them

Chapter Notes

:3 hewwo

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

When Izuku opens his eyes this time, back in the cell, with Miura across the bars and Shinsou at his side, he knows what to expect this time. It doesn't make it any easier to hear, doesn't ease the knot in his chest.

"Midoriya, I'm leaving this up to you," Miura says, and Izuku swallows, nods. This time, he doesn't speak right away. He tries to remember what he'd said last time, to get her to let him and Shinsou go with her, but he isn't sure that it matters. What convinced her to use her quirk on the facility in the first place, what led to everything that happened--it had been because Izuku told her about Sasaki's plans. The first time through, when Izuku hadn't known, she'd done *nothing*. Izuku swallows.

"Miura, is there--is there a reason why we couldn't use the entrance we came in through?" he asks. She blinks at him, brows furrowing slightly. Izuku's confused by the reaction for a second, before he remembers that Miura has no idea that twice, now, she's used an exit that requires literally ripping the base apart instead of the one they came in through. Izuku doesn't explain, though, just waits as Miura thinks, then opens her mouth to reply.

"Anyone could be using it," Miura says, looking down as if lost in thought. "I wouldn't take that route if it were up to me, because there's too great a risk of running into someone. And I know that, tomorrow morning, Kazuo and I are meant to guard it." She glances up at Izuku. "That's a strange thing to ask right away, though." Izuku knows what she's getting at--she's asking if he knows something that he hasn't shared. He takes a breath, nods.

"We can't--we can't go the way with the marble staircase," Izuku says, and Miura blinks. Izuku can see Shinsou squint in his peripheral vision. "It doesn't work."

"Your quirk?" Shinsou asks. Izuku nods. Miura frowns.

"What happens if we go that way?" she asks. Izuku swallows. He remembers the look on her face, when Manami confronted her. He wants to spare her that, and that means convincing her that that way is impossible.

"Manami catches us," Izuku says, keeping his face straight and his voice even. He doesn't elaborate--he's sure they each draw their own conclusions about the worst case scenario. Izuku

honestly doesn't think this reset will work, either, so at this point, he's just hoping that he can learn something new, figure out an escape route for once July is disabled, however they do that.

"Because of the noise?" Miura asks. Izuku opens his mouth to reply, but Shinsou cuts in.

"I don't understand what you're talking about," he says, frustration in his voice. Izuku glances over to him, where his brows are low and his lips are painted in a scowl. Izuku doesn't want to have to explain this, not after he's *lived* it so many times, but he supposes this has to be worse for Shinsou, who has no idea at *all* what's going on.

"There's an exit in--in one of the hallways, but Miura has to destroy the ceiling for it to work," Izuku explains. "It's not quiet, but--but only Manami, Sasaki, and Fury know about it, so the idea was that July and Threadbare wouldn't know to catch us there."

"Why would that matter?" Shinsou asks, shaking his head. Izuku swallows, glances at Miura, who's watching him with the same look of bewilderment. He's suddenly deeply, endlessly frustrated with the two of them. *Why don't they remember?* he thinks, before reminding himself that it's not up to them, that it's not something they've had any say in, either. It doesn't help the fact that he won't feel better about this until he knows he can get them *out*.

"July and Threadbare kill us in the end," Izuku says. "At the end of--of everything I've seen, July uses her quirk. It's some kind of energy beam, and it destroys a lot of the city. Usually with us in it." He takes a breath. "So we--we have to get out, *and* we have to stop them, but they're on a helicopter and--and I don't think we can move fast enough to get outside of July's range, not with the time we've been leaving." Izuku looks down at the concrete floor. It's a pale grey, in this light, and it's tinted almost blue. He's been here at this time what, four times now? How many more does he get before his quirk bites back?

"So you want to try the entrance we brought you in from," Miura says. "Because Manami was at the staircase?" She speaks slowly, like she's trying to understand. Izuku looks up at her, nods.

"It sounds like we should just leave earlier," Shinsou says, something between a scoff and a laugh in his voice. Izuku blinks.

"Earlier?" Izuku asks. Shinsou raises an eyebrow at him.

"You said that we didn't have enough time to get out of their range in the futures you saw, right? So it sounds like we just need to make sure we have more time than we did in your visions." Shinsou shrugs. "Did you see anything like that?"

Izuku swallows, then shakes his head. "N-No, not in--not in anything I've seen so far." Shinsou nods. Izuku looks back to Miura, who nods, hesitantly.

"I--we've still been left out of plans. It's a countermeasure against Haruta, I believe, but... everyone should be asleep until early morning, at least." She reaches up, pressing her knuckles to her lips. "We could leave now."

"I have a question first," Shinsou says, his eyes moving to Izuku. "When did you use your quirk? You told me it only activates when your life is in danger." There's a frown on his face, but Izuku just thinks, *why does he have to ask this every time? Don't we have more important things to worry about?*

"It--it ends in our deaths every time, so I'd call it danger," Izuku says, almost under his breath. Shinsou's frown deepens into a proper scowl, and he opens his mouth to say something, but Izuku

presses on.

“It doesn’t--I don’t think it matters *how* my quirk activated,” Izuku says, and yeah, he’s snapping at Shinsou a bit, but of *course* he is. “What matters is that--that we get out of here, *alive*. Miura’s willing to trust me. Are you?” Izuku asks. He stares Shinsou in the eyes, violet and tired and piercing. Shinsou’s mouth closes, pressing into a thin line.

“There’s a lot of things I want to know when we’re out of here,” Shinsou says. “You owe me that much.”

“Sure,” Izuku agrees easily. *I doubt you’ll remember this conversation*, he doesn’t say. He turns his gaze back to Miura. “Let’s go, then.”

“I should get your weapons, first,” she says, looking uneasy. Her gaze flits between the two of them, like she expects a fight to break out.

“That’s probably smart,” Shinsou says, breathing out a heavy breath of air. His gaze turns to Izuku. “We can wait.” Izuku hesitates, then nods. They’d been talking like Miura wasn’t there, anyway--it wouldn’t hurt to wait while she fetched their weapons.

“I’ll be right back,” she says, before pulling away from the bars of the cell and moving towards the door. Izuku doesn’t look to Shinsou as she does, and the other boy stays silent until the door opens and shuts once more. Izuku’s grateful for that, at least--he wouldn’t want to wake the rest of the Gekkeiju because of their fighting.

“What’s your problem?” Shinsou asks, when Miura’s gone. There’s no heat in the question, though. It’s asked plainly, with open curiosity, and when Izuku looks at Shinsou, his face is blank except for the eyebrow quirked up above his left eye. Izuku looks away, at the floor, his face suddenly filling with hot shame. *It’s not Shinsou’s fault that I haven’t figured this out yet.*

“S-Sorry,” Izuku says. He opens his mouth to explain, but closes it. He doesn’t know if there’s something he *can* explain without confusing or frustrating Shinsou more. To Izuku, this all seems painfully obvious. He’s been through it a half a dozen times, seen it all over and over again--shouldn’t it be clear, by now? Shouldn’t his problem be plain as day, easy for anyone to see? Who wouldn’t be upset, after all of this, so many deaths and not knowing how to *survive*? He knows what happens if he does nothing. He knows what happens if Miura acts alone, what happens if he and Shinsou go with her. He’s seen so many variations of the camera room from the previous day that he’s sure if you asked him which one *actually* happened, he couldn’t tell you for certain. Izuku feels like he’s got the whole puzzle, and he’s trying to explain it to Shinsou, who can only see one piece.

“You don’t trust me,” Shinsou says. Izuku glances up at him. His face is still blank, his eyes half-lidded. “You asked if I’d be willing to trust you, but you don’t trust me at all yourself. I thought you did, once, but,” Shinsou pauses, takes a breath. “You don’t trust anyone, do you, Midoriya?”

Izuku can only stare at him. By the time Izuku’s even thought of something he might say in response, something he could possibly follow that with (because really, is Shinsou wrong?), Miura is back. She’d been quicker than he’d thought, although Izuku supposes he has no reference for this. It’s the first time they’ve tried leaving so early in the night. She’s not carrying a backpack, this time, but she has Izuku’s belt slung over one shoulder and Shinsou’s capture weapon over the other. In her hands are the knives, and she’s got her own pouch of lead ball bearings on, along with a gun strapped to each thigh.

“My costume is too far away,” she explains, talking quickly as she hands their weapons off to them.

“It’s too big a risk. Someone could see me with it.” Izuku takes his belt from her gratefully, strapping it around his waist. He’s not surprised about Shinsou’s capture weapon, this time, although he does notice the lack of arm sheathes. He must make some kind of face, because Miura sighs, glances down apologetically.

“I couldn’t carry the arm guards,” she says. “But this should be enough.” Izuku wonders if she believes that, or if she’s saying it for their sake. He doesn’t think Miura’s the type of person to lie to make others feel better, but then again, right now, he’s so tired he doesn’t know *what* to think.

“If someone sees us leaving,” Izuku starts, making a decision right then and there. “We shouldn’t fight unless--unless we have to, to leave. We have to prioritize getting out of here.” *Out of this loop*, he doesn’t say. Miura frowns.

“Sasaki may order the destruction of the city anyway,” she says, carefully. Her gaze tracks Izuku’s, not the lock, as she reaches up a hand with the key to unlock the cell. “Are you okay with that?”

“N-No,” Izuku says, swallowing. “But Sasaki, she--I don’t--” *I can just kill myself if that happens*, he thinks. “It won’t--it won’t come to that.” Miura stares at him.

“Convincing,” Shinsou snorts. “Whatever. It sounds like the best shot we’ve got, anyway.” Izuku doesn’t turn to look at him as the cell opens up, Miura stepping back so the two of them can come out. Izuku steps out first, this time. He takes a breath, looking at the rest of the room, at the other empty cells. He wonders if there’s ever been anyone else in them. Surely--the Gekkeiju seems rather fond of taking prisoners, after all. He wonders how many of them died here. He thinks that he’s probably the only one to do it more than once.

They move quietly through the compound. It doesn’t look any different than it had when they’d gone later in the night, although Izuku supposes that makes sense. There aren’t windows or anything to show the sky outside, just the dim lights keeping the barest amount of orange-yellow light on the checkerboard, black-and-white floor. Izuku can hear their footsteps, but just barely--without her leaden boots, Miura’s nearly silent, just like Izuku and Shinsou. Maybe even quieter, which makes sense. She’s been doing this a lot longer than either of them have, after all.

The route to the entrance is shorter than the one to the white marble staircase room. By the time they’re at the hallway that will lead them to the exit, Izuku’s palms are sweaty. He wipes them on the front of his pants as Miura steps through the doorway into the hall. It’s open, but Izuku remembers from back when they’d arrived, what feels like *ages* ago, that it’d been closed off with a sliding lead panel, not a door.

“Did you open that?” Izuku asks, whispering. He gestures up to the doorway as they pass through. He keeps his voice as quiet as possible, but it’s still loud and clear in the sheer silence of the place. Miura nods, not elaborating. Izuku assumes it’d been so that other members could move around. The hallway they’re headed down is lit, now, a contrast to when they’d arrived, but it’s not from the hall itself--a number of lead panels he hadn’t noticed upon arriving have also been moved aside, revealing a few rooms. Those have lights much like the larger room they’d just left, and the glow that fills them is enough to illuminate the hallway.

As they continue moving down the hallway, Izuku hears something. The rest of them do, too, if the way Miura freezes in front of him and Shinsou’s breath catches is anything to go by. It’s not a voice, strangely enough. Instead, it’s a repetitive metallic sound, almost a grinding noise. Izuku strains his ears to listen--it’s far away, probably all the way at the other end of the hall--and he thinks it sounds more like clicking than grinding, really, but it’s such an out of place sound that he doesn’t know how to even describe it in his own head. He looks to Miura, but she’s watching him, waiting for direction.

Izuku swallows, then nods. They need to continue on--whoever's up ahead, the three of them can probably take them. Izuku doubts it's Manami or Sasaki. Sasaki wouldn't be down here, not so close to her big plan, and Manami had been in pajamas when she caught them trying to escape the other way. It doesn't *necessarily* mean she won't be here, but Izuku thinks that, if she *was*, it'd really just be terrible, terrible luck, anyway.

They move like ghosts through the hallway, towards the noise. As they grow closer, Izuku thinks he can hear murmuring, like someone talking quietly, but he can't tell anything else. He thinks it must mean there's two people--why would someone talk to themselves that much?--but he can't be sure. The voice or voices are drowned out by the repetitive metallic sounds. Izuku still doesn't know what it is, but he assumes it's some kind of machinery or something like that. Nothing else would make a sound quite like that.

By the time they reach the stairs, Izuku thinks he has a pretty good idea who's there, but he doesn't want to believe it. He can make out the details of the voices more, now--there are definitely two people, a woman and a man. The woman is younger than the man, and the man sounds a bit out of breath, like he's doing some kind of manual labor. Izuku only knows of one pair of people in the Gekkeiju who would meet that description whose voices he wouldn't recognize at this distance and volume, and they've been together in every reset so far, so it makes sense.

Izuku stops, taps Miura's shoulder to get her attention, although he isn't sure it's needed. They're right at the bottom of the stairs, and there's bright yellow lights seeping down from above. The noise must be from right at the top of the stairs--right under the lead panel that disguises the exit within the abandoned warehouse.

"July and Threadbare," he mouths, not daring to even breathe as he does so, lest the noise alerts the two to their presence. Miura and Shinsou both nod in unison, Shinsou's brows drawing together slightly and Miura's lips pressing into a thin line. Izuku is sure Miura had already known who it was, but he'd needed to be sure. He takes a breath, shuts his eyes for just a moment, then pulls out two knives, one for each hand. He watches Shinsou unwind a length of capture weapon, watches Miura open her pouch of lead ball bearings. A few of them float up, circling around her head like moons orbiting a planet.

Izuku turns to the stairs. He moves up each step carefully, but not too slowly--he's well aware that July and Threadbare would be able to see his feet before he'd be able to see them, with the way the ceiling is angled. There's more than enough light spilling onto the stairs for them to have a great view of the three of them approaching, if they just look downward. Izuku can only hope that the repetitive grinding noise, clicking and scraping over and over, whatever it is, is distracting to their eyes, too.

Miura walks to his right. With each step, more leaden balls lift from her pouch, swirling around her. Her eyes are barely violet, and with the brown underneath the glow and the golden light from above, it has the effect of making them look iridescent, like a butterfly's wings. Her mouth is set in a thin line, but she does not look particularly afraid. Just determined.

Shinsou, to his left, looks blank. Maybe tired, but that's normal for him. His capture weapon is ready, but Izuku can't help but hope it won't be necessary. If Miura can kill the two of them before they're even noticed, leaving will be a lot easier.

"Thread--" July says, her voice louder and clearer than before, and Izuku bites down on his lower lip. *Shit*, he thinks, abandoning stealth to move quickly. He darts forward, stepping up two steps at a time, and in just a few strides he can see them.

July is sitting atop a folded sheet of fabric that must be what holds the helicopter--it's a huge

amount of fabric, and Izuku can see what he thinks are the blades on the top portion of it. Her shoulder-length, teal hair is pulled back into a small ponytail, and her orange eyes are wide with surprise. Beside her, Threadbare has his sleeves rolled up as he operates something that resembles a giant car jack. It's pressing up on the ceiling, lifting the lead panel that blocks the opening. The panel is mostly off of the opening--it only needs to be raised a few more centimeters, then it could be moved to the side. It explains the grinding noise, which stops when Threadbare stops pressing down on the jack's pump, turning to the three of them with alarm in his eyes.

"Fuck," he says, reaching down to his belt. There's a piece of fabric there, not a gun, but when he touches it, it quickly morphs into a pistol. Around the room, Izuku realizes, there's a number of different pieces of fabric of varying shapes and sizes, mostly folded so he can't see what's embroidered on them. There's also a large electric lantern, just by the lack, casting the whole scene in bright, unwavering yellow light.

Miura raises a hand as she runs up the steps, and three lead balls go through Threadbare's skull. There is no hesitation, no moment for him to dodge, no way for him to block. Red blood splatters the inside of the room, coating the car jack and covering July in a spray of red droplets as Threadbare's corpse drops to the ground with a sick *crack*. She blinks, and Izuku sees what's happening even before he feels it, even before Miura could react.

"You--you traitor!" July says, leaning back, and she's glowing from the inside out, almost as bright as the lantern, but a shade closer to red. Izuku can see all of the blood vessels through her skin as something in her torso lights up, bright as fire. He can feel the heat, too, for the moment that July is ramping up. Izuku is twisting, getting ready to throw a knife at July, but Miura is quicker. She kills July with just one lead ball, just between the eyes. The body collapses back, red blood soaking into the folded stack of fabric, bleeding into the canvas.

Izuku stops, opens his mouth to say something--they've just killed July, quite possibly the biggest threat to the city and to their escape, without making much noise at all. No guns had gone off, and nothing had exploded. The loudest noise had been July's shout, and even that shouldn't have reached all the way down the hallway.

Except, Izuku realizes something. As July's body bleeds, the glow from within fades, and Izuku feels something familiar and awful. His head hurts. His stomach, too, a sort of awful, stabbing nausea. His skin prickles and burns, too, like he has a bad sunburn, but that's to be expected. It's awfully hot in the room, with July almost managing to activate her quirk.

But as Izuku hears the sounds of someone retching beside him, as he turns to see Shinsou bending over and throwing up, red, blistering burns covering his skin that had been facing July, Izuku comes to a horrible realization. July hadn't just *tried* to activate her quirk--she'd succeeded. The pounding in Izuku's head only grows, along with the aching in his stomach. It's not too different from what Izuku had experienced back at the sports festival, from overusing his own quirk. What had Recovery Girl compared it to, again? Izuku tries to find any other way to justify the way he feels right now, the way he can feel dizziness starting to take hold, the way Miura starts to vomit next to him, too.

"Radiation," Izuku croaks out. Neither Shinsou nor Miura reply, but that's okay. Izuku already knows, beyond any doubt, that they are all going to die. He doesn't know much about radiation itself, not really, but it makes sense. Threadbare, on the helicopter, had been wearing protective gear, which hadn't made much sense if it was just an energy beam. On that first round through, when Izuku had watched through the screen, he'd seen bodies drop *after* the beam, seen people stumble around as if drunk despite not being hit. He hadn't thought twice about it, back then.

Izuku feels the pull of his quirk, and he is suddenly immensely grateful that it's taking him now. He doesn't know if he's dying, or just losing consciousness--the swirling in his head has grown too great to stand for much longer, that's for sure--but he doesn't want to stay here and die slowly. He shuts his eyes and bears the pain for just a moment longer, just until nothingness overtakes him.

--

Izuku opens his eyes to a headache. It's mild, compared to the throbbing/aching/burning from moments ago, but it's there. It only reminds Izuku of what he already knows, what's become increasingly obvious as he's gone through resets, over and over. Four with this as the setpoint, but how many before that, in the camera room the first time? On how little food and how little rest? Izuku knows it's only a matter of time.

It doesn't change his reality, though. He ignores Miura's words when she says them, those same words of trust, of faith. He knows what she's saying, anyway, and there's no point, is there? It's not like Izuku knows the way out of here, not even with so much information that it feels as though his head might burst. He's tried so many things, gone through so much, and all he knows is more and more ways this can end in his death. He shuts his eyes.

"Midoriya?" Miura asks. There's concern in her voice, hesitant. Izuku shakes his head. He feels hot tears gathering at the corners of his eyes, frustrated and burning. He opens his eyes, reaches up to scrub at them with his sleeve.

"Don't... don't do anything," Izuku says. "There's no point." His voice is small. Shaky. He feels distant from it and too close to it all the same. He doesn't look up at either Miura or Shinsou. He doesn't want to see their expressions, doesn't want to answer their questions. He just wants to sleep. If he's going to die either way, he doesn't want to scrabble and claw and fight his way to a bloody, painful death. He'd like to rest. He'd like to sleep, until Sasaki comes and puts a bullet in his head herself.

"What do you mean?" Miura asks. Izuku sighs. He keeps his gaze firmly on the concrete of the floor.

"I used my quirk. I saw the future. There's no way out of here we just--no matter what, we die. There's no point. If we do nothing, at least--at least it'll be quick." Izuku doesn't think it'll be quick for *Tokyo*, but maybe he can convince Sasaki to just shoot him, first. Tell her it's the requirement for his quirk, which is true. *Except, then you'll just have to do this again*, his brain whispers to him, traitorous. Izuku pretends he doesn't already know that.

"So you're just giving up?" Shinsou snorts. "What a load of crap," he says. Izuku doesn't reply. He can hear the disdain in Shinsou's voice, the derision, but he doesn't care. Shinsou doesn't *get it*. No matter what Shinsou's been through, he's only had to go through each shitty thing *once*. Izuku lives through his worst nightmares on repeat, and each rendition, he has to perform, has to come up with better and better acts to please an audience of others who forget everything he says to them, who forget that he's died for them.

"What did you see?" Miura asks. "What did we try, in your visions?" There's a sense of urgency in her voice. Izuku wants to scream, *you were there! You were there, why don't you tell me!* but he doesn't.

"We did nothing," he says. "And then, you destroyed the compound. You killed Manami, then yourself." Izuku swallows, his mouth dry at the memory. "Shinsou and I were killed by July." Izuku breathes. "Her quirk is a radioactive blast. Even if we dodge, it's--it's the difference between a slow death or a quick one."

“It’s *what?* ” Shinsou interrupts. Izuku ignores him.

“We went together, the next time, but Manami stopped us then, too. July killed us. Then, we tried a different exit,” Izuku looks up, at Miura. “July’s quirk killed us, even after you killed her and Threadbare.”

“That’s--” Miura starts. Shinsou cuts her off.

“You never said what happened in the future where we did nothing,” Shinsou says, his voice sharp. “And I’m sure there are more than two exits in a place like this.”

Miura frowns. “No, it’s just two,” she says, sighing. Her face is drawn. Haunted. Izuku feels like he can relate to that. He also feels a little guilty for putting that expression on her face, but he mostly just feels... dull. Done.

“Sasaki kills us,” Izuku says. “If we do nothing, Sasaki kills us, and at least it’s painless,” Izuku says. He feels those hot, frustrated tears rise to his face again. “Can’t we just do that? I don’t want--I don’t want to *do* this anymore,” he spits out. The words feel like hot coals in his mouth, bitter and wrong. Izuku risks a glance at Shinsou, sees the other boy squinting at him with a scowl and suspicion on his face.

“Do what?” Shinsou asks, shaking his head. “How’d your quirk activate, anyway, you--”

“Isn’t this dangerous enough for you?” Izuku interrupts, tired of hearing the same question. “Haven’t we died enough for you?” He breathes out, leaning forward and burying his head in his hands.

“What are you *talking* about?” Shinsou asks, his voice rising in volume. “That doesn’t make any sense--”

“Shinsou,” Miura says softly, cutting him off. Izuku sobs weakly. His chest hurts; his throat burns. He just wants this to be over. He doesn’t know what to do. He’d rather stay dead than go through it all again.

“We’ll die if we do nothing,” Shinsou says, voice still angry and harsh. “He’s asking us to just sit back and die.” Izuku is sure he’s gesturing angrily, but he can’t see it. When Izuku speaks, it’s into the damp palms of his hands, wet with tears.

“Do whatever you want,” Izuku says. “Just don’t make me do it too. Just...” he trails off, unsure of what he wants that he can ask of Shinsou. If Shinsou used his quirk, could he tell Izuku’s to *stop*? To let Izuku *go*?

Miura and Shinsou keep talking, quietly, but Izuku ignores them. He tunes out every word they say, until he falls asleep from sheer exhaustion, his head aching and his eyes sore from crying.

--

When Izuku wakes up, head throbbing and face swollen from tears, it’s to footsteps. Not quiet ones, but not loud, either--like someone’s barefoot but making no effort whatsoever to be quiet. The steps themselves are quiet enough, though, that they probably wouldn’t have woken Izuku if that was all there was.

There’s also the sound of something metal scraping against concrete, and that’s what wakes Izuku up. He shoots upright, eyes widening, and he smells blood, tangy and metallic and sharp, even before Manami turns the corner. He’d known it was her when he heard her bat dragging along the

ground, known she'd be bloody from the smell, but seeing her in her pajamas, covered in red blood that surely isn't hers, tip of her bat on the ground--it still startles Izuku. He's still on the ground, but he scrambles back, the concrete scraping his palms. Dully, he registers that Shinsou is gone, and the cell is open.

Manami's face is twisted into a smile, but it looks almost painful. "I thought you'd gotten out for a minute," she says. Her eyes are not hearts, despite the expression on her lips. There's a splattering of blood up and over her right cheek, a spray not unlike the one that had coated July last reset, when Miura killed Threadbare. Manami's right eye even has blood in it, if the red tint is anything to go by, but it doesn't seem to be bothering her. She's barely even blinking as she moves to Izuku where he's frozen on the ground.

"Shinsou and--and Miura," Izuku gasps. He doesn't get up--if they're dead, there's no point, and the blood staining Manami's clothing is far, far too much for a person to survive having lost it. Manami reaches down, wrapping her off-hand around the other, so she's gripping the bat with both hands. Her quirk activates, but the hearts in her eyes fade just as quickly as they appear.

"Dead," Manami says. "I'm going to kill you too, you know." Izuku wonders if she's really feeling *nothing*. He thinks he can relate--there's a deep, dull *blankness* in him right now, and it's the part of him that just wants to give up, that just wants to let his brains be bashed in until his body and his quirk fail until he never comes back. Izuku swallows.

"That's fine," he whispers. Manami doesn't hesitate. Izuku sees the bat swing up, then down at his head, but he doesn't even feel the strike.

--

Izuku is already crying when he's back, when Shinsou is next to him and Miura is saying, "Midoriya, I'm leaving this up to you." He feels the tears welling up and tipping over, pouring down his cheeks even more acutely than he feels the headache, only a touch worse than last time. He doesn't heave ugly sobs, doesn't make a sound--he just stares at Miura where she looks at him through the bars, and tears drip down his face.

"Midoriya?" she asks, alarm in her voice. Izuku opens his mouth, and the words are spilling out before he can think about them.

"I can't do this anymore," he says. His voice is a ghost in the room, an echo of a whisper, but he knows they both hear it and he knows it doesn't make any sense. To them, this is the first time--it's *always* the first time. None of their arguments, none of their plans, none of their *deaths* were real. Izuku must look insane, but he can't be bothered to care. There's a long moment of silence.

"Uh, what?" Shinsou asks. He sounds uncomfortable. Izuku swallows. Last time, Izuku had just--he'd let them do it alone, without his help. He'd gotten them killed, however temporary because he *didn't want to try*. He'd been responsible for that death, even if they don't know they'd died. Izuku has been asking them, over and over again, to trust him--to act on blind faith, trusting his quirk and his judgment, even though they both know he's holding something back. Shinsou, at least, had made that very clear.

"Midoriya, what do you mean?" Miura asks. Izuku knows he's been quiet for too long, but he can't speak. He shakes his head, swallowing back a few sobs, a few shaky breaths.

He remembers what Shinsou had said to him, not long ago in a time that had been undone. *You don't trust anyone, do you, Midoriya?* Izuku knows he's right. He's been doing this every way he can think of, been telling Shinsou and Miura what to do, but it hasn't worked.

There's one thing Izuku hasn't tried yet, though. He closes his eyes, takes a deep breath.

"Shinsou, Miura," Izuku says, his voice shaky but clear. "I--my quirk doesn't let me see the future." Izuku opens his eyes, glances between the two of them. "It--it turns back time when I die."

Chapter End Notes

content warnings: graphic gore blah blah, vomiting, doom and gloom

[discord!](#) [blnt carrd!](#) [personal carrd!](#)

hheheheheheheh

me when i feel like this chapter sucks but i also, at the same time, feel like it is really good ... brain moment

a lead casket

Chapter Summary

last time: izuku gave up and got smushed like bug, then izuku TOLD THEM???

Chapter Notes

hi i feel like this sucks and is awkward at parts but. it is done (elmo fire gif) also it cuts off a bit weirdly at the end bc it was getting kinda long

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“I’m sorry,” Shinsou says, raising a hand up to press it to one of his temples as he blinks. “*What.*” The expression he’s making would be funny, under different circumstances. Maybe if Izuku’s head didn’t hurt and he wasn’t so exhausted, it still would be--as it is, Izuku just finds himself hoping, desperately, to not have to explain himself any further. To not have to prove himself, to have Miura and Shinsou trust him one last time. He doesn’t think he’d be able to take it, if they didn’t believe him, on this.

“You... you died?” Miura asks. Unlike Shinsou, whose face is so full up of emotions it’s hard to place a single one (confusion, alarm, disbelief, amusement) in the tangle of his twitching brows and the grimace on his face, she just looks... concerned, Izuku thinks. Her brows are drawn together slightly, but her face is otherwise blank.

“I--yeah,” Izuku says, looking down at the concrete. He wipes the sweat from his palms onto his pants--the motion doesn’t really calm him, but it’s familiar, so that’s something. “Lots of times, but--but I’ve been *here*, right *now*, five times. Six, if you--if you count this time.”

“Oh my god,” Shinsou says. A little incredulous laugh is mixed into his voice, breathless. “God, that’s...” Izuku looks up at him. “That makes *sense*,” Shinsou says, scrubbing a hand down his face. “Sorry, I shouldn’t be laughing, it’s not funny--”

“It’s--it’s okay,” Izuku says. He’s surprised, but it really is--he’d rather this response than the combative, distrustful Shinsou he’s been facing each reset, asking him questions he doesn’t want to answer, noticing things that don’t add up.

“I don’t get it,” Miura says, frowning. “How does any of this make *sense*? ” She doesn’t seem as amused by this as Shinsou. Not that Izuku thinks Shinsou’s *actually* amused.

“Just like nothing Midoriya did ever made any sense at all,” Shinsou says, shaking his head. “Like, how you knew about my quirk in the sports festival, for one thing.” Izuku blinks.

“I--what?” Izuku can vaguely recall that--he’d reset, and he joined Shinsou’s team, but he doesn’t know why that would be suspicious. Shinsou sighs, shakes his head, but there’s a small smile on his lips, like he’s satisfied to finally have the answer to this.

“No, it--I *know* you hadn’t actually seen me use my quirk, which is what you’d claimed,” Shinsou says. “And later, when I heard about your future sight or whatever, it still didn’t add up, because you weren’t in mortal danger or whatever. I mean,” Shinsou says, laughing. “It was a *school festival* . Nobody should have been in *any* real danger.” He looks at Izuku, his smile dropping. Izuku swallows.

“Are you saying he died during the festival?” Miura asks, slowly. Izuku is sure she already knows the answer to the question. Shinsou’s eyes don’t move from Izuku’s. Izuku wishes he’d smile or laugh again--this was easier to deal with when Shinsou was *happy* about it.

“I’d imagine,” Shinsou says, “death means a lot less to him than it does to us.” Izuku feels a chill go through his body, but he doesn’t deny it. He just sits there, staring at Shinsou. Miura makes a noise in her throat, but Izuku doesn’t break eye contact with Shinsou.

“That’s why he’s always so reckless,” Shinsou says. “That never made much sense, either. Seems like Midoriya’s scared of everything *except* death.” Shinsou’s eyes narrow. “Because he can’t die, right?”

“It--it still *hurts* ,” Izuku says, because Shinsou’s getting the wrong idea. “You--it’s not like I don’t feel the pain,” Izuku says. The words spill out messy and fast. “I don’t--I don’t like this, it’s not fun for me, I--”

“I didn’t say it was,” Shinsou says, shaking his head. “But death’s not the worst thing for you, not even close.” Shinsou raises an eyebrow. “In fact, if I had to guess--”

“Don’t,” Izuku says sharply. “Can we--can we save this stuff for after we’ve survived?” He swallows. “I don’t even--I don’t even know if you’re going to remember this.”

Shinsou pauses, his expression darkening. “Right,” he says, breathing out a short breath. “Sorry.” Izuku blinks, surprised.

“S-Sorry?” he squeaks out. Shinsou raises an eyebrow.

“Well, I’m being kind of an ass, aren’t I? Apologizing is what you’re supposed to do when you’re a dick,” he says. His eyes flicker to Miura, then back to Izuku. “How many times have you told us, anyway? You said this is the sixth time here, but since you never told anyone *before* , I’m guessing it took a bit.”

“Just--just this time,” Izuku says. Shinsou snorts.

“Okay,” he says, shaking his head. “Not saying that I blame you, since it’s not like I’ve been in your position, but--ever heard the phrase ‘two heads are better than one?’”

“I’ve gotten through plenty of stuff alone,” Izuku mutters. Shinsou opens his mouth, but it’s Miura who speaks.

“He couldn’t tell anyone,” she says, voice thoughtful. “Because if it got back to Sasaki, it’d be... disastrous.” She sighs, her lips twitching into a frown. “Except, I think... she already knows, doesn’t she?” It’s a rhetorical question, Izuku thinks, but he nods anyway.

“She--she wants a memory of death,” he says, his eyes darting to Shinsou. “I, uh, I don’t remember which--how much you heard in the time that--that stuck, but she--she knows about my quirk, and we kind of, uh, went through the camera room thing a few times?” Izuku swallows, watching as Shinsou’s brows draw together.

“You just asked her about what would happen at dawn, and she said you were bad at lying,” Shinsou says. “And then we went back to our cell.” He pauses, seeming confused. “That’s what you’re asking about, right?”

Izuku nods. “Um, in other--I call them resets--in other resets, I figured out that she’s got another quirk.” Shinsou nods, and Izuku remembers that, at one point, he and Shinsou theorized about that. “So she--she can take memories from people when they--when they activate their quirks.”

“You told us this,” Miura says, quietly. “Remember? Just a few minutes ago,” she says, then pauses. “Just a few minutes ago for me.”

Izuku blinks. “Oh,” he says. He and Shinsou *had* told her this, back before his first run through of this loop. “It... it feels really long ago,” he confesses. “Sorry.” He’s slept since then, several nights, and he’s died, too. Izuku is suddenly very, very aware of just how much more time he’s lived than Shinsou and Miura have since this began--how much longer he’s *been* here.

“Don’t apologize,” Shinsou says. His eyes narrow, and he chews on his bottom lip in thought. “If she knows about your quirk, there’s not much reason to keep it secret from us.”

“I--I didn’t want to tell anyone,” Izuku confesses. “You’re the first people I’ve told w-willingly, and, um, it’s not,” he looks down at his lap. “It’s not really the sort of power you want people knowing you have.” Sasaki’s just one example. A particularly bad example, granted, but Izuku knows there are others who could use his power for evil. He doesn’t want them to hear of his quirk, either.

“So, is that her plan?” Miura asks. “She’s... torturing you until you activate it in front of her?” Miura shakes her head. “All that, just so she can kill directly?”

“Y-Yeah,” Izuku says. “Except--except it doesn’t work like that,” he says.

“It turns back time,” Shinsou says. Miura looks at him sharply, her eyes widening.

“So even if he activates it, the quirk will undo Sasaki’s,” she breathes. Izuku swallows and nods.

“And I--I have no *control* over it,” Izuku says. “I can’t reset without dying or--or being close to it, anyway, and I don’t pick where I reset *to*, and if I do it too much I get sick and I’m useless, and I can’t *make* people remember things, so even if I wanted to give it to her, I don’t think I could.” The words spill out of his mouth, and he feels hot, frustrated tears build in his eyes. “So no matter how many times she--she kills you or me or has July blow everything up, it’s not--it’s not going to work, anyway. I’m just--we’re just *stuck*. ”

“Slow down,” Shinsou says. His voice is firm, but it doesn’t make Izuku’s anxiety worse. If anything, it’s the opposite. “We don’t know what happens next, so you have to tell us.” Izuku looks up at him. Shinsou’s face is serious, but calm. Izuku takes a breath, nods.

“Okay,” he says. “Okay.” He steadies himself by closing his hands into fists, feeling the pressure of his fingers squeezing into his palms. “So, um, the--the first time, I just--I wanted to see what happened, if I didn’t interfere with Sasaki’s plan,” he explains. Shinsou nods, and Miura mirrors the emotion.

“She--she takes me and Shinsou to the camera room at dawn. She makes it clear that she knows about my--my quirk, and then she showed me that she’d--she’s damaged the city, probably with July’s help.” Izuku bites at his lip. “Um, then she said, if I don’t--if I don’t give her a memory, she’s gonna destroy Tokyo first, then kill Shinsou, then me.” He chuckles darkly, wetly under his

breath. “This--all of this, it was all for me. It’s a show for--for me. We’re not the hostages for the heroes or for the city, Shinsou,” he says, meeting the other boy’s eyes. “The city is--it’s a hostage against *me*. You’re a hostage, too.”

“She killed me?” Shinsou asks, confused. Izuku nods.

“She, um, she had July blow up the city, first. July--her quirk, it’s radiation, she has a beam of radiation--she destroys Tokyo, or a lot of it, anyway.” Izuku feels frustration in his chest. “It took me *so long* to figure out it was radiation and not just an explosion or heat or--or something like that.”

“Where am I in all of this?” Miura asks. Izuku looks up at her.

“I, um, I don’t actually know,” he admits. “But the--the next time around, I told you about her plans and you kind of--you sort of went off on your own?” He winces when Miura’s face darkens. “And--and there was an earthquake, which was you using your quirk on the lead ore around the base, and then Shinsou and I got to the top of the white staircase and you and Manami were both dead.”

Shinsou jerks in surprise. Miura shuts her eyes. “How?” she asks. Izuku swallows.

“You--you’d killed Manami, then yourself,” he says, then adds, “I think,” to the end. Miura nods, short and sharp. Her hair bobs with the motion. “And then it--it didn’t really matter, because July and Threadbare were on a helicopter anyway and they blew me and Shinsou up.”

“A *helicopter*,” Shinsou deadpans. Izuku nods.

“Because--because Threadbare can make pretty much anything, and he’s got a *lot* of stuff,” Izuku says. “But the--the next time, we went with you when you destroyed the base and went through that exit, but, um, you still--you still had to kill Manami, and July still got us.” Izuku leaves out as many details as he can, from that one. He takes a deep breath, realizing that both Shinsou and Miura are listening to him patiently, before he continues.

“The next time, Shinsou suggested that we--that we leave right away,” he says. “So we did, and we went to the other exit, but that’s where July and Threadbare are leaving from, too,” he says. “They’re using a car jack to get the lead panel up r-right now, probably. Miura, you killed them both but--but not before July started to activate her quirk.” Izuku swallows. “I think--I don’t think I *died*, but I know--we were going to. It was too much radiation, it was--it was *horrible*.” He looks at Shinsou’s face, sees the way his brows furrow. Miura’s face is similar, although she isn’t meeting Izuku’s eyes anymore. Izuku swallows.

“I couldn’t--I couldn’t do it anymore after that,” he confesses. “I’d died at--at least half a dozen times, I think, the day before, and--” Izuku shuts his eyes, not wanting to see their reactions to this part. “And I just didn’t want to do it any more. So I--I told you to just give up and leave me here. I think--I think you did, I’m not sure. There wasn’t an--an earthquake, or anything, but Manami showed up and the cell was unlocked. She was--was covered in blood.” He swallows, feels his throat click. “She killed me. And then--and then I told you, and now here we are.”

“We left you?” Miura asks, surprise in her voice. Izuku cracks an eye open--it’s not what he expected to hear, not after he’d confessed to just giving up. He hadn’t even thought of it as them *leaving* him or whatever, but from the pained look on Miura’s face, maybe he should have. Shinsou exchanges a glance with her, his lips twisting into a grimace.

“Well, it’s not like I remember what I was thinking,” he says dryly. “But I’m sure we had a reason

for it.” Izuku nods, his head moving in jerky motions.

“You said you only can... reset so many times, right?” Miura asks, her voice slow and cautious. “How many more times do we have?”

Izuku blinks. “Um,” he starts, then thinks. “Probably one or two until I’m deadweight,” he says, judging it by the throbbing in his temples. “But I--I don’t know if I’ll have it in me to--to explain it all again,” he confesses. “I just--I need this to be over. I’m--I’m so *tired*,” he says, his voice getting squeaky and strained. Miura’s lips twitch downward.

“So we’ll get it this time,” Shinsou says. “Most of us operate under the assumption we only get one try anyway, so.” He sounds confident, but it doesn’t really make Izuku feel any better--it’s not like Shinsou *remembers* any of what Izuku’s just described to him. *At least one of us thinks it’s possible we’re getting out*, Izuku thinks, even though he’s also aware there’s a chance that Shinsou’s just acting confident to try and make Izuku feel better.

“How though?” Izuku asks miserably. He knows he sounds pathetic--probably looks it, too. He hasn’t seen his reflection, but he’d imagine he’s pale and thin looking, with bags under his eyes.

“I... may have an idea,” Miura says. “Lead can be used to contain radioactive materials. It’s what they store them in, after all.” Izuku looks at her, sees her lost in thought. “I don’t think it’s accidental that my quirk is a natural counter to July’s. Sasaki wouldn’t partner with someone so dangerous without a way to stop them if they turned against her.”

“Midoriya,” Shinsou says. “You said Miura controlled lead ore and made an earthquake, right?” Izuku nods, and Shinsou looks to Miura. “Is there a lot of that around here?”

Miura blinks, then nods. “Enough that I could definitely damage this base badly, if I tried,” she says, her brows furrowing. “Why?”

“There’s a lead panel above and lead ore all around,” Shinsou says, gesturing with his hands in the shape of a box. “They’re already surrounded in lead. You just have to...” He moves his hands together, like he’s catching a bug between them. Miura’s eyes widen, and Izuku realizes what he’s getting at.

“We should hurry,” Izuku says. “They--we probably don’t have much more time,” he says. “We talked for so long.”

“I’ll go get our weapons,” Miura says, looking at Izuku first. “Do we have time for that?”

Izuku hesitates, before he nods. He’s not sure, but he doesn’t want to imagine how things would turn out if they got in a fight unarmed, and Miura’s rushing off before he has a chance to reconsider. Izuku lets out a breath he hadn’t realized he’d been holding--he feels sick to his stomach, all of a sudden, although he doubts it’s because of quirk overuse. He drops his head to his knees, reaching his hands up to scrub them through his hair.

“You okay?” Shinsou asks next to him. His voice is cautious, and Izuku suspects that he’s fully aware Izuku *isn’t* okay. Izuku nods against his knees.

“As okay as I can be,” he says, his voice muffled. “You--you two took it better than I thought you would,” he says. It’s a small confession, compared to the one he’d given earlier, but there’s plenty of weight to it. Izuku can hear it in the stillness of the space, in the pause before Shinsou speaks again.

“Yeah, well, you’re not the most honest person, but I don’t think you’d lie about that in a situation

like this,” Shinsou says. Izuku winces. Shinsou’s right about him not being honest--Izuku hasn’t been honest with anyone at UA, well, *ever*. He’d told Kacchan, sure, and Neito knows, but neither of them had really been *willing* on Izuku’s part.

“I’d rather have nobody know,” Izuku says. He means it, but only kind of. It doesn’t feel like a weight off his chest or anything, having told Shinsou and Miura, but it isn’t oppressive and terrifying, either. It’s neither like he imagined it would be nor what he’d hoped. It’s just... reality. It’s a reality that is neither particularly painful nor all that reassuring, but he supposes that’s to be expected.

“Well, I’d rather know,” Shinsou says. Izuku lifts his head from his knees, looking at Shinsou, who shrugs. “Maybe it’s selfish, but it makes me feel like I’m on an even playing field with you.” Izuku frowns.

“What--what do you mean?” he asks. Shinsou arches a brow.

“You always know everything before everyone else,” Shinsou says. “And you’re always making all the decisions, even with the people at the school and the commission. You order them around and they’re also intimidated by you in some weird way and it’s...” He chuckles. “It’s impressive, but it’s frustrating. I’d assumed it was because you could see the future, but...” Shinsou trails off, smiles sadly. “It’s a bit more than that, I guess.”

“I--I don’t think it’s really like that,” Izuku says, chewing at his lower lip. Shinsou shakes his head.

“Maybe not as much as I think it is,” Shinsou says. “But you have a lot of power. You know a lot, and it makes people afraid of you, I think.” He tilts his head to the side. “I mean, would Sasaki do all of this, be so careful about you, if she wasn’t afraid of you? On some level?”

Izuku stares at him. He doesn’t reply, doesn’t have the words to. Sasaki, afraid of *him*? Sasaki, Phosgene, the villain who specializes in mass casualty, who will (and has) destroyed Tokyo? The leader of the Gekkeiju, who raised Miura and Manami and Fury? Afraid of *him*?

The door opens. Izuku feels relief at the sound, both because he won’t have much time to think while they’re escaping and because Miura was quick. The door shuts behind her, and she rushes up to Shinsou and Izuku, passing them their weapons silently before she turns to unlock the cell door. Izuku notes the lead ball bearing pouch at her waist--it’s the only weapon she seems to have on her. He hopes it’ll be enough.

As the three of them leave the cell, moving silently in the direction of where July and Threadbare must be, Izuku hopes that this goes well. Part of him thinks it has to--it’s the best plan they’ve had so far, and he’s sure, at least, that this will stop July from taking them out at the end. But another part of Izuku, a huge part of Izuku, knows that things never go so easily for him. He never gets what he really wants, not the first time through, anyway.

They stop when they hear the sound of the car jack. Now that Izuku knows what it is, it seems painfully obvious, although it seems unfair to his past self to expect him to guess it. He’s probably only ever heard one once or twice before in his life, if that, but it’s a distinct sound, metal on metal grinding as the jack lifts the weight above it. Izuku looks to Miura, who nods, raising a hand. Izuku knows she doesn’t *have* to--he’s seen her use her quirk without moving plenty--but it’s a warning for him and Shinsou. Izuku steps back, as does Shinsou, and there’s a horrible creaking and groaning, and then the ground is shaking. They can only just barely *see* the staircase from here--there’s no way that July and Threadbare could have known they were coming.

There's no scream or shout. There probably wasn't time for one. The rumbling is *loud*, though, loud enough to cover the sounds of one. Izuku winces, raising an arm to protect his face as a wave of dust and small pieces of concrete flutter out at them. When he drops his hand, there's a small smile on Miura's face.

"There's nobody alive in that room," she says, eyes glowing violet. "And I don't think any radiation is getting out any time soon." Izuku nods--he can't help but smile back at her, even though his heart is hammering in his chest. This is where the unknown really begins, because Izuku hasn't lived a timeline like this yet. He doesn't know what will happen from here.

"We should hurry," Shinsou whispers, and Miura nods. They start to move down the hallway, back towards the main room. The exit that July and Threadbare had been at is completely unusable, of course. Izuku thinks of the lead encasing their corpses, encasing the fabric embroidered with the helicopter, too. The bodies wouldn't need to be buried, at least--that had already been done, in a lead casket no less.

They run. There's not much point in stealth any more, Izuku supposes; the collapse of the entrance tunnel hadn't exactly been *quiet*. He wouldn't be surprised if it could be heard above ground for blocks, even, not to mention the earthquake it had caused. It wasn't as severe as the quake from that first time, but Izuku knows everyone in the facility is surely aware of what's going on at this point. They're short on time, so speed has to come first.

They reach the main room, and the sounds of their footsteps change. They echo in the space, filling the room, at least until Miura stops short, freezing. Izuku and Shinsou do the same, and Izuku wants to scream. He reaches to his belt, pulling off a knife for each hand.

In front of them, Manami blocks the hallway that leads to the white marble staircase, to the only other exit in this place. She has a pleasant smile on her face, those same pajamas on, and a bat in one hand. Her face brightens when she sees them.

"So this is what it comes to," she chirps, her smile widening. "I guess this is the line for you, then, Sumire." She takes a step forward. Her eyes aren't hearts, not yet. Izuku knows how this goes, though, and when he hears Miura reach down, open her pouch of ball bearings, he decides he's going to interfere. He steps forward, knives held up in a fighting stance.

"Let us through, Manami," he says, his voice firm despite the ache in his head and his heart. "You aren't--you won't survive this, if you fight us." Manami's eyes jerk over to him, widening like she's surprised. She tilts her head to the side.

"Did you look into the future for me? Just for me, or because you don't want to die either?" she asks, reaching a hand up to tap on her lower lip, like she's thinking. As she flickers in the multicolored echoes of her quirk, her grin widens and she reaches down, wrapping her off hand over her right, gripping the baseball bat tightly.

"We have to hurry," Shinsou hisses, quietly. "We can't fight her, Fury, *and* Sasaki." Izuku nods as Manami moves forward, going to strike at Miura. Miura steps back, sliding out of the way--Izuku is suddenly very grateful that this room is so large. It's more that big enough for them to fight in.

"I don't want to fight you," Miura says, her voice strained. "You--you're not like them," she says, pleading. "You can leave." Manami swings the bat at Izuku, this time, but it's like her heart isn't in it--she's looking at Miura, still, and Izuku dodges easily. The bat cracks the tile where it smashes into the floor.

"No, Sumimi, I'm not like *you*," Manami corrects, pouting suddenly. "I can't leave. Don't you *get*

it?" she asks, swinging the bat at the wall, hard. The concrete, solid and strong, cracks, pieces of it falling to the floor in chunks. Manami smiles viciously. "I'm not strong like you, Sumimi! The only way I'm leaving the Gekkeiju is in handcuffs or a bodybag." She takes a step forward, almost lurching. Miura jerks back, like she'd expected a hit.

"Are you--do you *want* me to kill you?" Miura asks, spitting the words out. Shinsou exchanges a glance with Izuku, jerking his head at a hallway to the side, and Izuku follows the motion. He feels a chill go down his spine when he sees Fury, a grin on his face and a gun in his hands, pointed at them. He's wearing sunglasses, but Izuku can see the amber glow of his eye through them all the same, and the rush of terror that fills him is paralyzing.

"Do I?" Manami quips, before she darts to the side with her bat, to the hallway where Fury is approaching. There's no way she can see him--the angle of the walls should block both her and Miura from seeing down the hall at *all* , but she must see Izuku and Shinsou's reactions, because she goes to the entrance of the hall, swinging her bat up, then to each side. The ringing noise it makes is terribly loud, so much so that Izuku and Shinsou both wince, and when Manami skips forward out of the hallway, it collapses. There's a muffled shout of protest from the other side--Fury, surely--but the hallway is completely blocked by concrete and stone.

"What are you--" Shinsou starts, probably in an attempt to use his quirk on her, but Manami doesn't seem to even *hear* him.

"I don't want any interruptions," she says to Miura. "It's me and you, or me and you and your new friends, I guess," she looks to Izuku, grins. "So are you going to take me seriously or not?"

Even as Miura rushes forward with her lead bullets to intercept the swing of the bat that Manami aims at Shinsou, Izuku can't help but feel those words were directed at *him* . He feels a rush of something cold go down his spine as the situation becomes clear to him. He knows how this ends. He's seen what happens if Manami and Miura fight--Miura will win, but only when she finally actually decides to *try*. Until then, she can hold Manami off, but just barely. Manami will taunt her and pick at her until she snaps, and then Manami will be dead and Miura will be destroyed.

Izuku watches as Manami makes eye contact with him again. She's sliding back, preparing another swing of the bat, when he throws the knife. It's a messy, telegraphed throw; there's no way she doesn't see it coming. Manami is strong, and more than that, she's *fast* . Izuku knows she could dodge this. This knife, aimed just between her eyes, should have no chance of hitting, not with the way that Manami is watching him as he throws it, not with the way he hasn't tried any tricks or anything to conceal it.

The knife sinks into her forehead with a sickening noise. She drops to the ground immediately--there is no pause like in movies or manga. Izuku does not have any time to process what just happened, beyond the fact that *she did not dodge*. Izuku had thrown a knife she surely, without any effort, could have avoided, and yet she *chose not to*, and now she's dead.

Izuku stares at where Manami has collapsed to the ground. Miura makes a noise in her throat, something between a wounded animal and a person about to cry out in alarm, but Izuku does not move his gaze from Manami. She's still looking at him, even in death. There's a thin trickle of blood travelling down between her eyes, along her nose and down her cheek. She looks unreal, like a doll.

"Oh for fucks--we have to *move* ," Shinsou says, and then there's a hand grabbing Izuku's arm and yanking him forward. Izuku realizes, suddenly, that Shinsou has grabbed both him and Miura and started to tug them towards the hallway that leads towards the white marble staircase. Izuku shakes off his hand after a moment, recovering enough to jog beside him, and he sees Miura do the same,

even though she has to reach a hand up to wipe away tears.

Miura's silent tears have escalated into sobs by the time they reach the white staircase, but she doesn't say anything, and Shinsou and Izuku don't, either. She rips open the exit hatch without any warning or explanation--Izuku has to grab onto Shinsou, steadying him as the ground rocks hard and almost knocks them both onto their asses. The earthquake doesn't stop when the hatch is open, and it feels like the ground is shaking and quivering in time with the shaking sobs that wrack Miura's shoulders as she marches up, out of the base.

When they reach the top of the stairs, she turns to Izuku, and Izuku expects to be killed. He doesn't know how, exactly, but he thinks *this is where this ends*. He almost shuts his eyes, too, except then Miura is grabbing the front of his shirt and pulling him in and *oh*.

"Thank you," she says as she pulls him in, wrapping him in a tight hug. It's an awkward hug, like she's not used to holding people, and they're both covered in dust and dirt and blood, but Izuku hesitantly hugs her back anyway. He can feel her shaking, can hear the sobs in her voice, but he still asks,

"W-Why?" He hadn't expected *thanks*, not for killing someone important to her. Miura shakes her head.

"It--It would have been me otherwise, right? I would have--I would have had to do it." She pulls away from Izuku, sniffing. There's a small smile on her face.

"Uh, not that this isn't sweet and all," Shinsou starts, and Miura chuckles, reaching up to wipe her face on her sleeve.

"Yeah, we should hurry," she says, whipping around. She starts to jog again, and Izuku's the one left a few paces behind as Shinsou seems to take it in stride. Izuku gives himself a shake before following after them, his legs and lungs burning with the effort of running, of really, truly *sprinting* after so long trapped underground. He can't deny that, even with the death and the stress and the pain, it feels good. It feels better, knowing that, this time, there won't be July and Threadbare to rain fire on them from above.

"Where are we going?" Shinsou asks. He's less out of breath than Izuku, which makes Izuku think that he's experiencing more quirk side effects than he thought. Izuku takes a breath.

"We... there should be some heroes a few blocks ahead," he says. His voice is breathy, but neither Shinsou nor Miura comment on it. Miura's still sobbing, but she sounds better, and Izuku doesn't know what he could do about it, other than reset and try again. Izuku's not sure he wants to do that, though, and even if he did, does he think that he could save Manami?

When Izuku sees the familiar scene from the screens, the damaged section of Tokyo with heroes cleaning it up, he almost starts to cry from relief. It's a little less relieving knowing that the crater is *probably* at least a little radioactive and that the people cleaning it up are probably getting hurt from it, but when they run from the street into the open area and see Ren and Mirko both turn around in unison, twin looks of surprise on their face, Izuku really does think he might start crying.

Chapter End Notes

[discord!](#) [blnt carrd!](#) [personal carrd!](#)

its fuckin HARD to write scenes with no real life comparison (like.... what's the irl equivalent to telling shinsou and miura about izuku's real quirk? there is none)

also i feel like everyone is ooc here but how do i even know at this point if it's ooc or character development what is personality

the truth

Chapter Summary

last time: THEY GET OUT and someone got hit with a knife oops

Chapter Notes

MERRY CRIMMAS have a chapter!!

sorry this one is so late!! i have gotten the writer's block and then my cat has been sick :(he will be okay but he needs surgery and has been getting a lot of medicine and vet trips poor bby. he has bladder stones :(his surgery is in two days!

i hope u enjoy and that this does not disappoint i agonized over how to do this chappie

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Izuku is so out of breath with exhaustion and relief that he almost passes out right then and there. Almost, but not quite--instead, when he and Shinsou stop, he braces himself on his knees to catch his breath. He doesn't miss the look Shinsou shoots him, but he's quickly distracted when Ren and Mirko react to their presence.

"Sumire?" Ren says. It's quiet, because she's so far away, but she starts running over quickly, stumbling over the rubble in her haste. Miura looks just as surprised to see her, and she starts to sprint even faster. Izuku watches as she throws herself into Ren's arms, watches as Ren catches her in an embrace, looking startled and relieved all at once.

"Ren!" Miura says, her voice thick with tears. She buries her face in Ren's shoulder, and Izuku looks away, suddenly feeling like he's intruding on something private. Instead, he turns to Mirko, who runs over to him and Shinsou, surprise on her face.

"Midoriya! Shinsou!" she calls, a smile on her face. "Holy shit, did you two get out on your own?" She asks. "And is that--"

"That's Leadfoot, yeah," Shinsou says. Izuku nods.

"She--she got us out," Izuku adds. He casts a glance over to Shinsou, hoping the boy takes it as the request it is to keep quiet about his quirk. "There's--there's a lot that happened."

"Yeah, no shit," Mirko laughs. "Lemme call Eraser and the Commission, and we can get you guys somewhere safe and warm, yeah?" Her eyes track over Izuku and Shinsou's bodies. Izuku's suddenly acutely aware of how tired he is, how beat up his body is, and that sounds wonderful, but...

"Miura," Izuku says, biting at his lip. He looks to Miura, where she and Ren are still in each other's arms. Miura pulls back, looks at him. "The--the Commission, will they--" he cuts himself off, but

he's sure the point is clear. Miura's face, tear stained and relieved, hardens.

"I..." Miura looks down. Ren's grip on her shoulders tightens.

"They're assholes," Ren says, firmly. "Don't call them," she says, then, looking at Mirko. Mirko blinks, jerking her head back in surprise.

"What--I have to, Angel," she says. She gestures to Izuku and Shinsou. "We talked about this, you--"

"I'm *kidding* . I know," Ren says, cutting her off with a smile and a wave of her hand. "Just like I know *Rivera* isn't going to be willing to listen to reason." Her eyes move to Sumire, her smile strangely dark. There's something serious in her eyes as she asks, "Are you still okay with running?"

Miura doesn't hesitate. She nods. "You don't have to come with me," she says. She's looking at Ren like she's the only person there, like Mirko and Izuku and Shinsou aren't listening in. Her dark eyes are serious, the violet glow fading from them slowly.

"I want to," Ren says. She looks past Miura, to Izuku. "I won't be far. We're not leaving Japan, not until this is over." Izuku swallows. He knows what she means. *When Fury and Sasaki are defeated*, he thinks. He imagines the tunnels that might stretch under their feet even here, partially collapsed around the two villains, but he can't find it in himself to imagine them dead from that alone. It seems like it would be too easy. Like things couldn't end that way. He tries not to imagine Manami, surrounded by lead, a knife through her skull. That felt too easy, too, even though he knows there were too many deaths before it.

"Okay," Mirko says, sighing and rubbing the back of her head with a hand. "Well, I'm not gonna stop you." She's scowling--Izuku has the feeling that she and Ren have spoken about this, before. Izuku wonders when. Izuku's mouth is dry. He wipes his hands on his pants.

"M-Miura," he says, suddenly. He hadn't realized he was going to speak, but when he does, a splutter of a name, Miura looks at him. Her face is a mess--smeared with dust and dirt and half-dried tears--but she's not crying, not anymore. She looks almost hopeful.

"Do you--are you okay with--" Izuku cuts himself off. He can't make himself form the words in front of Ren and Mirko, who don't know, or maybe it's because Shinsou and Miura *do* know. He can't ask *is this ending okay with you* or *should I reset* , but he thinks Miura gets the idea, because after a moment, her face switches from confusion to shock.

"I--" Miura starts. She blinks, shakes her head. "Midoriya, you don't need to do anything," she says, after a moment. She closes her eyes, tipping her head down slightly. "This... I think this is what she wanted."

Izuku swallows. He can hear his throat click. Ren is staring at him, and he's sure Mirko would be too, if he looked over to check. Izuku doesn't, though. He watches as Miura opens her eyes, fixes him with a watery gaze. The small smile on her face is firm, though.

"I'm... this is the best outcome, for me," she says. "And it's thanks to you that I'm able to have this. So don't feel guilty." She reaches up a hand, holding onto Ren's shoulder. Izuku thinks he understands.

"O-Okay," he says. He shifts his gaze to Ren, nodding his head awkwardly. "Take--take care of her?" It comes out as a question, even though he'd meant it to be a request, but Ren nods, a smile

creeping up her lips.

“Of course,” she says. “We should get going, but you guys look after yourselves, okay?” She tips her head to the side, grinning. “We’ll see you around, I’m sure.”

“R-Right,” Izuku says. He raises a hand to wave as they turn, untangling from each other. Izuku wonders, briefly, if they’ll be okay to get away, but then the two of them are jogging away and he remembers that Ren is a trained hero and Miura is, well, *Miura*. Izuku thinks they’ll be fine.

--

Izuku thinks, maybe, that *he* will not be fine. When the adrenaline had worn off, things had stopped feeling quite so sharp, quite so important and focused and detailed--the trip from the damaged part of the city to the ambulance is kind of fuzzy. He remembers asking about July and being reassured that *this* crater was made by a normal, non-radioactive bomb, remembers trying to say he didn’t need medical care and being completely ignored, and... that’s about it, actually. The ambulance ride is completely gone from his head, that’s for sure, because now that he’s sitting on the edge of a hospital bed, legs dangling off the side and feet swinging above the linoleum, he can’t remember how he got here at all.

Izuku glances to the bed beside him. Shinsou’s in a similar state, dressed in the same clothes as before and sitting on the bed rather than laying down. He’s staring at Izuku, though, watching him without making any effort to hide his gaze. Izuku swallows, looks away. His throat feels dry and his head is pounding, but other than that, Izuku actually feels... okay. His muscles are sore, of course, and he’s sure that when the medical staff run their tests they’ll find the stuff that comes with his quirk overuse, but all things considered, neither of them are particularly injured.

Izuku’s torn between saying something and maintaining the silence in the room. It’s clear that they’ve been quiet for a while, and even if he’s kind of out of it (he still feels fuzzy, to be honest) he knows it would be okay to stay silent. Izuku doesn’t know if he should say something, though. Should he ask Shinsou if he’s okay? Should he say something about Manami? About Miura and Ren?

Izuku swallows. He opens his mouth, about to say something, although he has no clue *what*, but there’s a knock at the door. He shuts his mouth, his eyes focusing on the door as it opens. Izuku feels the tension bleed out of his body when he sees Aizawa, his mom, and Tsukauchi walk through the door. He breathes out a breath he hadn’t realized he’d held when he’d heard the knock.

“Izuku!” Inko cries, rushing over to him. Her face is red, like she’s been crying--she probably has been. Izuku reaches out and accepts her hug, even though the tight squeeze burns the sore muscles all over his body. His mom is warm and soft, and that more than makes up for it. Besides, he can feel her shaking as she wraps her arms around him, and it makes a spark of guilt build in Izuku’s chest that he wishes desperately he could snuff out.

“God, baby, you scared me so bad,” Inko says. “I thought... I really thought that villain was going to hurt you.” Her fingers dig into Izuku’s arms, and Izuku squeezes her back.

“It’s--it’s okay, mom,” he says, because it’s not like he can say that Sasaki *didn’t* hurt him, not with Tsukauchi and his lie detector quick in the room, but this at least isn’t a lie. It *is* okay, since Izuku and Shinsou and Miura made it out alive and Tokyo is mostly unharmed.

“Midoriya and I need to talk to Aizawa and Tsukauchi,” Shinsou says. Izuku swallows. He feels his mom’s grip tighten on him for a moment before she starts to pull back, wiping tears off of her

face.

“We’d planned to debrief as soon as you two were ready,” Tsukauchi says, and when Izuku looks over to him he’s glancing over at Aizawa with an unreadable expression on his face, somewhere in the territory of nervous but otherwise difficult for Izuku to understand.

“It can wait if you need more time,” Aizawa says, directed at Inko. She shakes her head, sniffing and straightening up.

“If--if the boys are ready, I’m fine with it,” she says, looking to Izuku. Izuku’s mouth feels dry. His eyes dart over to Shinsou, who is watching him and only him. *He’s going to tell them about my quirk*, Izuku realizes.

“Shinsou, I--you don’t think--” Izuku starts, stopping and shutting his mouth when Shinsou’s eyes narrow and his lips press into a thin line.

“I have some important information that I want to share as soon as possible,” Shinsou says. Izuku’s heart thuds in his chest, but he looks to Aizawa and nods, his head moving shaky and uncoordinated. Aizawa stares at him for a moment before sighing.

“I’ll text you when we’re done, okay?” Aizawa says to Izuku’s mom. She nods, leaning forward to wrap Izuku in another hug before she pulls away.

“Mouse and I miss you,” Inko says, giving Izuku a watery smile. “As soon as you’re home, I’ll make katsudon, okay?” She smiles widens, showing teeth. “And then I’m going to personally wring the necks of everyone who let you go on this mission.” Izuku thinks he hears Tsukauchi choke a little bit, but it’s hard to tell over the sound of his own laugh.

“Th-thanks, mom,” Izuku says. Inko nods before turning and walking out of the hospital room. It’s quiet as she does so, and Izuku can hear her footsteps against the flooring. He swallows, his throat suddenly dry.

“Now,” Aizawa says, and Izuku can see his teacher (wearing a t-shirt and sweats, looking worse for wear like he’d been in a fight himself) turn to Shinsou. “What information are you talking about?”

“Don’t--don’t the doctors h-have to talk to us?” Izuku interrupts, before Shinsou can speak. He can feel his pulse thrumming in his finger, buzzing at the tips. He swallows down the lump in his throat. Everyone in the room turns to look at him. Shinsou cocks an eyebrow.

“You were in the room when they cleared us,” Shinsou says, tipping his head to the side slightly. “We’re fine, other than needing to rest and that you’re anemic.” He says it slowly, carefully. Izuku feels heat rise to his face.

“Are you alright, Midoriya?” Tsukauchi asks. His voice is friendly, concerned. Izuku swallows, biting at his lower lip.

“S-Sorry, I’m just--I’m just a bit shaken up!” Izuku says, raising his hands. “I-I heard that! I just--I’m just tired, you know, there’s not--it’s fine, really.” He would continue, but Shinsou speaks, a slow drawl.

“He’s lying,” he says, plainly. Izuku opens his mouth to retort, but all that comes out is a little squeak. He feels shaky and off-balance, hot and sweaty even in the relatively cool room of the hospital.

Tsukauchi sighs. “Shinsou’s right,” he says, under his breath, almost as if to himself. Beside him, Aizawa crosses his arms over his chest, sighing a low breath, his brows drawn.

“Something is clearly going on,” he says. “Midoriya, take a deep breath. We don’t have to do this now if you’re not okay.” He moves closer to Izuku, sitting down in a chair Izuku had hardly even noticed, kind of near the beds. Aizawa has to drag it over for it to be close enough for a conversation, and it puts him below eye level for Izuku, but it somehow makes Izuku feel a little less like he’s being interrogated.

“He’s upset because I’m about to reveal his biggest secret,” Shinsou says, his voice dry and even, almost like he’s being sarcastic, except Izuku knows he *isn’t*. It doesn’t do anything to help Izuku’s nerves, that’s for sure. He can feel his heart seize up in his chest, undoing the work that Aizawa had done to calm him down.

“You *what?*” Aizawa asks, sounding surprised more than anything. Izuku sees him narrow his eyes at Shinsou.

“I hope you trust Tsukauchi because the only reason he’s part of this conversation is so that you know I’m telling the truth,” Shinsou says. Izuku can’t breathe.

“Shinsou, what--” Aizawa starts, cutting himself off with a hiss. “*Yes*, I trust Tsukauchi, but you’d better have a good reason to--”

“I do,” Shinsou says. “And that’s the truth.” If Izuku wasn’t so busy freaking out, he might be thinking about the hard edge to Shinsou, the fact that standing up to Aizawa like this, being argumentative and confrontational, means that *Shinsou* is nervous, too. Izuku doesn’t really process that, not consciously, anyway. Instead, he presses a hand to his chest, feels how hard and how fast his heart is beating instead of its bone cage.

“Sh-Shinsou, don’t--don’t, *p-please*,” Izuku gasps, squeezing his eyes shut. “You--you c-can’t tell them, I--I d-don’t want them to--to know,” he says. The words feel like razors, climbing up his throat and spilling painfully out into the room.

“Tough,” Shinsou spits out. Izuku looks at him, and Shinsou doesn’t meet his gaze, staring straight across the room as he speaks. “Midoriya’s lying about his quirk. He has to--he has to die for it to activate.”

There’s silence in the room, except for Izuku’s own ragged breathing. Izuku watches the blood drain out of Aizawa’s face, watches as his eyes move to Izuku. His jaw works slowly.

“Is that true?” Aizawa asks. His voice is low and rough, but there’s no anger in it. There’s something else there, something like a warning but not quite. Izuku squeezes his hands tight into fists, feels the bite of his nails against his palm. He can feel pressure in his head from how hard he’s tensed up, but he can’t relax while he waits for Aizawa’s reaction, for how Aizawa will respond.

“He’s telling the truth,” Tsukauchi says, voice shaky. Aizawa sighs through his nose, shutting his eyes for a moment before he brings a hand up, pressing it to his forehead. Izuku thinks, faintly, that Aizawa looks like he feels almost as bad as Izuku does about this.

“Midoriya,” Aizawa says, very carefully, like he’s picking each syllable out, shaping it so that it’s just as he wants, like he thinks the fragile tension in the room will snap if he doesn’t. “Can you activate your quirk without dying?”

Izuku blinks. “A-Actually, yeah?” He sees Shinsou’s head whip towards him. “If I--if I’m just really, um, really *close* to death, sometimes it--sometimes it activates without me--without me dying.” He watches Aizawa’s face darken and he realizes that, perhaps, this was not as reassuring of a statement as he thought it would be. Izuku swallows.

“When you said your quirk required mortal danger to activate,” Aizawa says, reaching a hand up to tug at his long, dark hair, “you meant you *actually died* or were dealt a *fatal wound*?”

“It’s--it’s not as bad as it sounds,” Izuku says, on instinct, the words popping out even as, mentally, he’s thinking that it’s *worse*. Aizawa doesn’t seem to have put together the *other* aspect of his quirk, the fact that Izuku’s died on *purpose*. That, and that the dying isn’t actually the worst of it, not by far.

“That’s a lie,” Tsukauchi says. His words aren’t accusatory, not in the slightest. He sounds sad. When Izuku looks over at him, he’s taken a seat on the edge of an unoccupied bed in another part of the room. His brows are drawn and he looks *exhausted*.

“Does that mean that every single time you’ve used your quirk, you’ve actually *died* or come very close to it at least once?” Aizawa asks, his eyes on Izuku.

“Isn’t that obvious?” Shinsou snaps, impatience clear in his voice. Izuku uncurls his hands from fists just long enough to wipe the sweat from his clammy palms onto his pants. He wishes he’d at least gotten to change into clean clothing, first.

“I want to hear it from Midoriya,” Aizawa says, voice calm despite the fire burning in his eyes. Izuku does not, in fact, want him to ‘hear it from Midoriya,’ but he also suspects that he has little choice.

He nods. The only thing keeping his heart from hammering out of his chest is the fact that this is Aizawa--at this point, he trusts that his teacher, at least, isn’t going to try to hurt him on purpose. He might stress him out or react badly or try to stop him from using his quirk, but at the very least, Aizawa won’t hurt him. Izuku’s faced worse.

Aizawa leans forward, resting his elbows on his knees and burying his face in his hands. His hair spills forward, shielding the rest of his face from view, but it does nothing to hide the long groan of what Izuku can only assume is frustration that spills out from his teacher. Izuku feels his heart clench in his chest, despite the reassurances he just told himself. *I could just reset to get rid of this*, he thinks, before he realizes that after this, he most likely absolutely could *not*. Izuku swallows down the thick taste of fear, sharp and metallic, that is fast rising in his throat as Aizawa sits up straight again and speaks to Izuku, his voice hard and angry.

“You have *volunteered* to use your quirk before to get information,” Aizawa points out, and Izuku swallows, biting at the inside of his cheek. “Please tell me that you were using that as a cover for information you already had and not that you were intentionally getting yourself *killed* for intel,” he says, his voice dry and strained. Izuku swallows again, somehow unable to get the lump that’s seemed to build in his windpipe to move.

“I--I don’t remember?” Izuku says, his voice cracking. He waves a hand when Aizawa raises an eyebrow. “I mean--a lot has happened, um, and I don’t--I’ve sort of had a lot more time pass since then than you have?” Izuku winces when Aizawa’s eyes widen slightly at that. Izuku wraps his arms around his knees, drawing them up to his chest and staring sullenly at the floor.

“We,” Aizawa starts, before clearing his throat. “Okay. We’re going to come back to *that*.” Izuku’s staring at the floor, but even over the miserable pounding of his heart in his ears, he can

hear Aizawa draw in a breath. Izuku almost wishes that he was having a full-on panic attack instead of this miserable, almost-there kind of anxiety. At least if he was really, completely freaked out, Aizawa might *stop*. It's a terrible thing to wish for, he knows, but Izuku just--he doesn't want to explain this. Even as he wishes Aizawa wouldn't, he starts to ask another question, speaking carefully and slowly still, like he's wording things so Izuku can't slip through a loophole in his words.

"Have you ever intentionally put yourself in a situation that you knew would kill you?" Aizawa asks. Izuku tightens his grip around his knees. That's an easy question. He doesn't want to look up at his teacher. He knows Aizawa well enough to know that he's deeply upset by this, and Izuku doesn't want to see what it looks like on his face as he answers.

"Yeah," Izuku says, softly, like somehow they won't hear. He still hears Shinsou breathe out through his nose, almost a laugh. He thinks that this is obvious to Shinsou, who's seen Izuku's interactions with Sasaki in at least one timeline that he remembers. Or maybe it's obvious to everyone, and Aizawa wants to hear Izuku say it to be sure. Maybe that, or he doesn't want to *believe* it's true. Izuku doesn't know.

"Have you ever done it for information?" Aizawa asks. Izuku can feel his hands going clammy again, even though he's hugging his knees. Half of him wishes that Aizawa would leave it alone and the other half wants to spill everything just to get it over with.

"Well that--that information ended up saving lives," Izuku mumbles into his knees.

"Stop beating around the bush and just ask the *actual* question you're thinking of," Shinsou says, irritation in his voice. Izuku glances up at him, heart suddenly pounding in his throat, only to see Aizawa shooting him a warning glare before looking back at Izuku.

"Have you ever killed yourself?" Aizawa asks, and Izuku *swears* his vision goes dark for a second with the force of the headrush he gets from the sheer anxiety that question gives him. His stomach goes cold as he stares at Aizawa, wrapping his cold, clammy hands around his knees and clinging to them like they're the only thing keeping him afloat. He can hear the little squeak that comes out of his mouth when he first opens it, before he draws in a shaky breath.

"Maybe we should take a break?" Tsukauchi suggests nervously, quiet off to the side where he's been listening for lies, but nobody acknowledges him.

"It's--sometimes I--sometimes there are situations worse than death," Izuku says, his voice uneven and shaky. "So if--if everyone *else* is going to--is going to die, or--or I'm going to be--going to be killed *later*, when my--when my quirk won't matter, it--it makes *sense*--"

"That's *happened*?" Aizawa asks, sounding horrified as he cuts Izuku off. Izuku pauses, feeling a bead of cold sweat run down his back as he nods, his head bobbing shakily.

"M-Most of the time I--usually I get killed by--by someone else, if that's the--the situation," Izuku says, to try and make Aizawa feel a little better, although judging by his teacher's face, it doesn't really help much at all.

"But you..." Aizawa swallows visibly, shaking his head slightly. "Midoriya, you've demonstrated foresight in situations where *nobody* should have died." He stares at Izuku, his tired and bloodshot eyes *sad*, not accusing or angry like Izuku expected. Under that stare, Izuku can't say anything. It's all he can do to look back at his teacher and not hide his face, not break down crying again. He just stares.

“Midoriya,” Aizawa continues, voice soft. “Have you ever killed yourself outside of a life or death situation?” Izuku does not answer. The silence says more than words ever could.

Shinsou’s voice is quiet when he speaks. “Midoriya knew things he really shouldn’t at the sports festival,” he says. “Things about my quirk, but also about how to beat his opponents later on.”

Aizawa nods. “His final exam was... Nezu and I were always suspicious *something* was going on, even before we knew he was Ace.” Aizawa shakes his head slightly, his gaze dropping to the floor. “But we thought Ace’s power required mortal danger, and if this quirk requires *actual death*, there’s no way it’d activate during the exam itself. Nezu wouldn’t have killed Midoriya, not even by accident.”

“Yeah, that’s...” Tsukauchi says, his voice grim. Izuku feels a bubble of something hot and nasty in his chest, and the words spill out before he has a chance to think about them.

“E-Everyone *else* got to--got to use their quirks,” Izuku spits out. “Why couldn’t--why am I any different?” He regrets the words even as they’re leaving his lips, but at the same time, he doesn’t disagree with them. It’s just his quirk. He knows that Aizawa and Shinsou and Tsukauchi are upset but dying, *resetting*-- it’s just what he has to do to use his quirk. *Why does everyone else get to use their quirks, but not me? What makes me so special?*

“So you did use it for school,” Aizawa says, his voice flat. Izuku looks at him, and he sees *horror* on Aizawa’s face, like when Aizawa had heard Izuku was being *tortured*. Izuku stares at Aizawa.

“How often?” Tsukauchi asks, and Izuku shakes his head, raising his hands to his ears as if that would block him from being able to hear their questions.

“I’m--I’m done,” he says, his voice shaky and high-pitched. “I’m not--I’m not a--answering any more questions!” He squeezes his eyes shut. “I--I don’t--I’m done,” he repeats, leaning forward to bury his face in his knees, hands over his ears pressed between the sides of his knees. The pressure aches against the bones of his hands, but it’s grounding, even if he can still hear what the others are saying.

“Midoriya, breathe,” Aizawa says. Izuku ignores him. He presses his hands into his ears, feels his fingers dig into the bones of his skull, his temples and his jaw. He can hear the blood rushing through his head, can hear every beat of his heart, the blood pushing against the walls of his veins and arteries. It sounds like it wants out.

“We pushed too hard,” Tsukauchi says, a murmur like he’s talking to himself. Izuku thinks that’s obvious. He thinks Shinsou never should have opened his mouth. He should have kept Izuku’s secret to himself. Everything was fine before. Izuku may have been dying over and over again, alone and afraid, but at least he was in control. Now, that’ll be taken from him, and all of his dirty secrets are going to be dragged out into the light for everyone to pick through and dissect. He’s sure of it, and that knowledge stings deep in his gut, worse than the sting of his fingernail in the flesh of his face.

Shinsou says something to Aizawa; Izuku can’t understand it, not over the pulsing rush of his own blood in his ears. He thinks, distantly, that he might be hyperventilating. It’s hard to tell. He thinks Aizawa snaps back at Shinsou. Tsukauchi might be trying to calm them down, get them to stop fighting. Izuku is separate from the argument. He is in his own little world. He’s always operated separately, with his own plans, his own intel, and his own *time*. This is no different.

Izuku feels warm hands on his own, prying his hands off of the side of his face. He looks up to see Shinsou staring down at him, his face twisted in a scowl as he pulls Izuku’s hands down. Izuku can

register a sting as the cold air hits where he probably scratched gouges into his scalp and face above his ears.

“Mi--Izuku,” Shinsou says, growling out Izuku’s first name. “Stop it and *listen to me*. You have survived so much worse than this,” he says, pausing to suck in a breath, his hands squeezing Izuku’s with a force that isn’t painful, but comes close. “So take a deep breath and suck it up, because even if you don’t *want* it, there’s a lot worse out there than people worrying about you.” Shinsou smiles slightly, a bitter thing. “I know it hurts to have a secret you don’t want revealed dragged out painfully, but you know it’s for your own good, don’t you?”

Izuku stares back at Shinsou. “Y-Yeah,” he says, barely a whisper, rough and shaky, but it’s enough. Shinsou’s quirk washes over him like a blanket of soothing, cool water, and Izuku thinks he can feel it when Shinsou sighs in relief.

“Deep breath,” Shinsou says, and as soon as Izuku sucks in a proper, real breath, Shinsou releases the quirk. He’s still holding Izuku’s hands, but his grip is loose, gentle. Izuku stares at him. He thinks he gets why Shinsou was so angry at him, when Izuku told Aizawa about his parents, but he also understands why Shinsou had to tell Aizawa about his quirk. The betrayal burns bright in his chest, but he’s breathing, shaky and a little too fast, but it’s enough.

“Th-thank you,” Izuku says, sliding his hands out of Shinsou’s. “But I’m--I’m still done answering questions for now.” He looks over to Aizawa, sees his teacher grimace. Izuku grimaces right back at him.

“Fine,” Aizawa says, clearly not pleased. “Just... who already knows?” It’s a fair question, Izuku supposes. Izuku wets his dry lips with his tongue.

“You can’t--you can’t interrogate them behind my back,” Izuku says. “They don’t deserve that.”

“Like he can promise that right now,” Shinsou scoffs, earning him a glare from Izuku.

Aizawa sighs. “I’ll wait until you’ve had a good night’s sleep and some food in you, but then we *have* to talk more about this,” he says, reaching up a hand to run it through his hair. “I--I can’t believe I missed this.”

Izuku swallows. “Haruta, o-of course,” he says. Aizawa nods. His lips are pressed together, but he doesn’t seem surprised. “Neito, too.”

“Summer camp?” Aizawa asks. Izuku nods.

“He--when Muscular attacked, he copied my quirk,” Izuku explains. Aizawa stares at him. Izuku wonders what he’s thinking. “And, um, Kacchan--he made me tell him over winter break.”

“And Shinsou,” Aizawa finishes, with a sigh. He runs his hand through his hair again.

“Miura knows too,” Shinsou says. “And Sasaki seems to, although I doubt that’s because of anything Midoriya told her.” He says it dryly, matter-of-fact, but the information still sends a shiver up Izuku’s spine.

“I am going to *throttle* Kojima, Bakugou, and Monoma,” Aizawa mutters, almost to himself. Izuku swallows.

“P-Please don’t!” he squeaks. “I--I made them promise to keep it secret,” he says, biting at his lower lip. “I, um--it’s not really like they could stop me, either.” Aizawa stares at him for a long moment before breaking eye contact with a heavy sigh and shaking his head.

“Fuck, kid,” he says. “You’re going to make me go gray early.” He stands up slowly, like his joints hurt. Izuku feels himself tensing up as Aizawa moves to him. Shinsou takes a step back, letting Aizawa take his place in front of Izuku, and Izuku leans back slightly as his teacher leans forward. Izuku feels his heart rise up in his throat until Aizawa sighs, opening his arms and reaching out to pull Izuku into a hug.

“Aizawa-sensei?” Izuku asks as Aizawa pulls him in close, squeezing him tight.

“I am *so* glad you’re alive,” Aizawa says, his voice loud from how close it is to Izuku’s ear. “I hate that you’ve died, but... I’m glad for your quirk, if it means you’re still here.” He squeezes Izuku tighter. “And thank you, for telling us.”

“I didn’t--I didn’t really have a choice,” Izuku says, confused. It almost comes out as a question. He reaches up tentatively, returning the hug.

“I know,” Aizawa says with a sigh. “Better late than never.”

Izuku doesn’t say anything else. He just relaxes slowly into the hug, letting himself lean forward into his teacher, curling his fingers into the fabric of Aizawa’s shirt.

Chapter End Notes

content warnings: accidental self harm, discussion of suicide, panic attack, dissociation, references to character death

[discord!](#) [blnt carrd!](#) [personal carrd!](#)

happy holidays if u celebrate and happy random winter day if u don't!

safety

Chapter Summary

last time: the beans are spilled!!!

Chapter Notes

HAPPY 1 YEAR OF BLNT!!!

i cannot believe that a year after i randomly decided "yeah sure ill write a vigilante izuku fic out of my little idea why not!" i am both still writing it and that people are still **READING** it !! i cannot put in words how much the support means to me <3 <3 i have made so many friends through this fic and i am so grateful to all of you!! im so excited for the year to come... to think that i started off 2021 with the goal of writing 365k words (avg of 1k a day) in the year LMAOOOOO

also my cat made it through surgery and is doing great!! he comes home today :D

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Izuku thinks he might have forgotten what it felt like to be clean. Stepping out of the dorm bathroom, wrapped in clean pajamas and with towel-dry hair, feels *amazing*. He hasn't really been clean since the 28th, and according to the calendar on his phone, it's February 7th. It feels like it's been *way* longer, but Izuku really doesn't feel like doing the math to figure out how long, exactly, it was for him, so he's content with knowing how many actual days the final timeline ended up being.

There's something extra nice about stepping into the living area of the student dorms, too. School is in session--they'd all gotten class off, apparently, because of the crisis in Tokyo and teachers being gone, but all of his classmates are here, at the dorm. It's strange, seeing them again, but Izuku also hasn't actually *spoken* with them. Upon returning to the dorms, exhausted and filthy, Kacchan had materialized seemingly out of thin air and escorted him through the dorms, yelling at anyone who so much as looked at him.

So, Izuku's not exactly shocked when, upon stepping into the living area, it appears that all of his usual classmates have been instructed not to ask him any questions. He's sure of it, in fact, given that Kacchan is standing in the corner and glaring at them and that Neito is leaning against the back of the couch closest to the bathrooms, his arms folded over his chest and a lazy smile on his face. Izuku can see Uraraka and Todoroki watching him from the kitchen area, but they make no move to approach, and Izuku's okay with that--he's happy to see his friends, but he doesn't think he's ready to answer questions just yet.

"Hey," Neito says, his voice soft. Izuku feels his stomach clench, and he moves forward, practically throwing himself at Neito. Neito catches him easily, a soft puff of air escaping him as Izuku hugs him.

“Miss me?” Neito asks, voice light even as he holds Izuku tight. Izuku huffs out a breath before he pulls back from the embrace, not moving away so much as standing up straight.

“You have no idea,” Izuku mutters. What he wouldn’t have given to be here, with Neito, instead of at that base. Neito seems to catch what he meant, because his smile twitches down, and he leans down slightly, catching Izuku’s gaze.

“Well, you’re here now,” Neito says. “I don’t know all of the details, but Aizawa knows now?” he asks, his eyes narrowed slightly. He doesn’t look suspicious or surprised--just concerned. Izuku swallows.

“Y-Yeah,” he says. “Do you know who--who he’s told?” Izuku’s hands tighten where they’re still holding onto Neito’s upper arms. Neito hums.

“I think just those of us who already knew, Nezu, and your mom,” Neito says. “I don’t think she knows details, though,” Neito says, when Izuku tenses up. “I have to admit, the only way I got permission to come over here was agreeing to take you to the staff dorm for dinner.”

Izuku frowns. “I’m not--I’m still not answering any questions,” he says. Neito raises his hands, shrugging.

“You don’t have to. I was just told that your mom and Mouse really, really wanted to see you for dinner. Aizawa and Shinsou won’t even be there,” he says. Izuku relaxes. He feels bad, but he really doesn’t want to talk to either of them right now. He knows that they’re (supposedly) trying to help him but... he thinks he understands, now, why he didn’t see much of Shinsou after he told Aizawa about his parents.

“Okay,” Izuku agrees. Neito gives him a small smile, tipping his head to the side slightly.

“Are you planning on avoiding them forever?” he asks. Izuku tries to glare at him, but he doesn’t think it’s very threatening.

“I’m--I’m considering it,” Izuku mutters, although it comes out more whiny than he meant. Neito chuckles and reaches out slowly, telegraphing his movements before he grabs Izuku’s shoulder, giving him a gentle squeeze before he steps around Izuku, leading the both of them towards the staff dorm.

“Your classmates have a lot of questions,” Neito says. “And I doubt Katsuki is going to be able to hold them off forever.” Izuku swallows. He moves to follow Neito. They’ve been talking quietly enough, but he can feel his classmates’ gazes on him now that Neito’s mentioned them.

“What do--what do they know?” Izuku asks. Neito hums.

“Well, the bombing in Tokyo was on TV, as was Phosgene’s livestream,” Neito says, casting a glance back at Izuku. “The one with you, and the one without. I don’t know if you saw the one with just her.” Izuku shakes his head.

“So they--they know I’m Ace,” Izuku says miserably. He’d been in his costume during the livestream, after all. His costume *minus the mask and goggles* .

“Yup,” Neito says. “Although, I wouldn’t worry too much,” he says, pushing open the door to the outside. “They think you’re pretty awesome.”

“R-Really?” Izuku asks. He shivers as the cold February air hits his still-damp skin. He’s not really dressed for the weather, but the walk to the staff dorm is short, and Neito is moving quickly.

“They’re not mad at me for--for lying? About my quirk?”

“Well, they think you have Mulligan, for one,” Neito says. “And no. They’re just worried for you and impressed, I think. I don’t know them as well as you do, but they don’t seem *angry*.” He pauses. “Maybe the kid with the split colored hair? But he seems more mad that you didn’t tell him than anything else.”

Izuku nods, pressing his lips together. “Todoroki,” he says. “I... I probably should have told him,” he says.

“You should have told a lot of people,” Neito says. “But you can’t change the past, so there’s no point in being mad at you for it.” Neito pauses. “Although, I guess you are quite possibly the only person who *can* change the past.”

Izuku smiles slightly. “Only--only the recent past,” he says.

“And only if you die,” Neito says, nodding from where he’s walking slightly in front of Izuku. His eyes flicker to Izuku, bright blue in the sharp winter dusk. “I’m going to tell Aizawa about you hurting yourself with your quirk, by the way. I haven’t yet, but I will.”

Izuku nods. “I--I kind of figured,” he says. It sounds strained. He can’t bring himself to be really *angry*, though, not at Neito. He figures he’s made Neito keep this a secret for so long that he can’t really ask him to lie for him, not any more.

“We’re here,” Neito says, nodding to the building in front of them. They still have to climb the stairs, but he’s right. “Are you holding up alright?” Neito asks, pausing at the bottom of the stairs. Izuku blinks.

“Actually, uh, yeah,” Izuku says, swallowing. “It’s--dealing with this stuff is a lot easier than, um, getting murdered,” he says, the edges of his lips curling in a half-hearted smile. Neito raises an eyebrow slightly before he nods.

“I guess it would be,” he says. “Alright, well,” he gestures up, at the stairs. “Ready for dinner?”

As if replying, Izuku’s stomach rumbles. Izuku smiles. “Yeah, I think so,” he says. He starts up the stairs, seeing Neito move beside him. Izuku’s still sore, but he doesn’t feel *too* sick. He’s surprised, honestly, with how much he’s reset. *I guess all my training actually did pay off*, he thinks to himself. It’s probably a good thing that he did it before people found out, since there’s no way they’ll let him continue now. Izuku just has to hope that his quirk isn’t like a muscle, won’t lose strength with disuse.

Neito and Izuku reach the top of the stairs at the same time, but Izuku lets Neito get the door to the staff dorm. Izuku feels anxiety burning low in his gut, but it’s the slow, smoldering kind, not the kind that makes him breathe fast and clutch at his chest. He swallows around the small lump in his throat as Neito pulls the door open, gesturing for Izuku to walk inside.

“After you,” Neito says, dipping his head slightly. Izuku gives him a nervous smile. He steps into the dorm anyway, the warmth of the heated air hitting him. Izuku glances around immediately, even as he’s still walking in, Neito close behind him. He can see his mom and Mouse in the dining area, with Katsuki in the kitchen, stirring something on the stove. Mouse spots him first, her big brown eyes lighting up as her face stretches in a wide smile.

“Izuku!” Mouse exclaims, standing up at the table. Beside her, Inko looks up, startled, before her face softens into a smile and she stands up as well, crossing the room to greet Izuku. Izuku is

grateful for the fact that she lets him be the one to pull her into a hug instead of reaching out, and he can tell that she's relieved that he's willing to hug her. He wonders what everyone thinks happened to him in Tokyo. If they think he was tortured, like he's been by the Gekkeiju so many times before.

"Mom, let go of Izuku," Mouse says, her voice loud in the room. "I wanna see him!" Izuku hears Inko chuckle into his shoulder before she pulls away from Izuku, stepping aside so that the path between Mouse and Izuku is clear.

"Mouse, what do we say when we want something?" Inko asks, her voice playful. Mouse pouts, squinting slightly as she walks over from the dining area. She's wearing a long-sleeved green shirt and a pair of fluffy, white pajama bottoms that are a little too long on her, dragging just a little on the ground. She walks right up to Izuku, tilting her head back so she's looking him in the eye. Her cheeks have filled out, giving her that young, baby-soft look she'd never really had before, and her curly brown hair is clean and shiny.

"Please hug," Mouse says firmly, reaching her hands up. Izuku smiles, wrapping her in his arms.

"Of course," Izuku says. Mouse is warm, way warmer than any normal person would be, but Izuku's pretty certain that's just a part of her quirk. She feels less like skin and bones than last time he'd held her, and Izuku is suddenly very painfully aware of how long it's really been since he's been able to spend time with Mouse, between being captured and the time he'd spent preparing for the 28th beforehand. Izuku squeezes her tighter to him, feels her little hands clinging to the back of his shirt.

"Missed you," Mouse says. "You were back there," she adds, quieter. It's a question, coming from Mouse. Izuku blinks. He knows his mom wouldn't have let Mouse see the news, not when she might see the Gekkeiju on there, but he also knows that Mouse is a lot smarter than she seems on the surface. There aren't a lot of places Izuku would have gone that would have put him in danger and had everyone as worried as they must have been while he was gone.

"Not the tower," Izuku says, softly. "But yeah, I--I was there." He breathes out. "You're still safe here." Mouse grips him tighter, twisting her head up to look up at him.

"You have to be safe too," she says firmly. It's one of the clearest sentences Izuku's ever heard her say, and Izuku swears he can feel his heart skip a beat when she says it.

"O-Okay," Izuku says, giving her a little smile. He reaches down, putting a hand in her hair. It's soft and silky. Clean. Something feels so right about seeing her happy, safe, and *clean*. She wriggles out of his grasp, turning and marching into the kitchen.

"Katsuki making katsudon," she says, walking right up to Kacchan where he's been watching from his place by the stove. Izuku watches as she leans forward, reaching for the pot. Kacchan swats her hand away.

"Wait 'til it's done," Kacchan growls, although there's no real heat in his voice. Mouse makes a growling noise right back at him, reaching up towards the pot again, only for Kacchan to bat her hand away again. Izuku can't help but laugh at the sight.

"They get along really well," Inko says with a fond smile on her face. "I was a little worried, since Mouse doesn't like loud noises, but she's fine with Katsuki." She sighs. "Did you know she doesn't burn?"

Izuku blinks. "I--That can't be right," he says, thinking of the cigarette burn scars on her arms. Inko

gives him a sad look, like she knows what he's thinking of.

"It's a new development, we think. She took cookies out of the oven without gloves and, well, she was fine," Inko says, looking back over to Mouse and Kacchan, who has apparently given Mouse a small piece of chicken to taste.

"That's--that's amazing," Izuku says. Inko hums in agreement.

"I offered to try using the other aspect of her quirk some, like I do with Eri," Neito says. Izuku jumps slightly; he'd almost forgotten Neito was there. "Mostly just to figure out if she'd be able to get control over it, so she can ask questions without having it on if she wanted to."

Izuku nods. "Th-thank you," he says, since he's not really sure what else to say. Neito gives him a funny look.

"It's no big deal," he says. "You're the one who did the hard part," he says. Izuku swallows. He knows Neito means the rescue from the tower, saving Ren and Mouse. It feels like so long ago. It feels even longer ago that he went to the Gekkeiju for the first time, captured after dying with Neito. That was the first time someone knew, and now... now *everyone* knows. Izuku's hands suddenly feel clammy, and he has to wipe them on his sweats.

"Food's pretty much ready," Kacchan says from the kitchen. "I *was* going to plate it up all pretty, but the brat's already gotten her little fingers all over it, so there's no point." His voice is fond despite his words, and when Izuku looks up, Mouse has wrapped herself around one of his legs like a little koala. She looks very proud of herself.

"And for the record," Inko says. "Nobody is asking you anything or bothering you about anything, Izuku." Izuku blinks, turning to look at her. "We're going to have a nice, relaxing dinner and that's that."

Izuku smiles. "That--that sounds nice," he says. Inko smiles, the laugh lines on her face deepening.

--

After dinner, Izuku's belly is full and he feels relaxed and safe for the first time in a long time. His mom had kept true to her word--nobody had asked him *anything*, although Izuku's sure Kacchan had really, really wanted to. The katsudon was amazing, and Mouse had eaten a frankly impressive amount. She'd clearly been working hard to make up for all of those years of being underfed, and Izuku suspects Kacchan's cooking has been helping quite a bit.

After a while, though, she'd fallen asleep right at the table, her little face pressed to the wooden surface, thankfully *next* to her bowl and not in it. Inko had been apologetic, but honestly, Izuku had been getting tired, too.

Now, Izuku's walking back to the student dorm, Neito to his right and Kacchan to his left. It's even *colder* outside now than it had been before dinner, so Izuku's wearing Kacchan's jacket, which is way too big on him, embarrassingly. It's not that Izuku's skinny, really, and he's not even *that* much shorter than Kacchan! He's convinced that the thick canvas jacket is oversized on Kacchan, too. There's just no other way. It's comfortable and warm, anyway, and Kacchan had insisted.

"Twelve o'clock," Kacchan murmurs. Izuku blinks, startled out of his thoughts. He looks up, straight ahead, and sure enough, there's someone up ahead, right by the door to the student dorm. Izuku recognizes the fluffy lavender hair immediately, and he clenches his jaw slightly.

"I told him to just go to bed," Neito says with a sigh. Izuku glances over to him, but Neito seems to

have been talking to himself. Shinsou is waiting by the door, but Izuku doesn't plan on giving him the satisfaction of stopping for him. Maybe it's petty, but Izuku doesn't plan on talking to him, either. He keeps walking, even though he can see Neito and Kacchan slowing down beside him. It's cold outside, anyway. He can see his breath puffing in the air.

"Neito, you can go back to your dorm," Izuku says, casting a glance back to where his friends have stalled at the bottom of the stairs. Neito's eyes widen slightly in surprise. "It's late, right?" Izuku gives him a small smile. "I can handle Shinsou. I've--he's really not that scary," he jokes. Neito seems to relax slightly.

"Alright," Neito says. "If he gives you any trouble, text me." He slides his hands into the pockets of his hoodie, turning in the direction of the 1-B dorm, but Izuku can tell he's keeping one eye on Izuku and Kacchan as he walks. He's moving too slowly *not* to be. Izuku huffs out a breath, glancing briefly over to Kacchan before he starts up the stairs again.

"I could blow him up for you," Kacchan says, so quietly Izuku almost misses it. Izuku doesn't reply (they're close enough at this point he's pretty sure Shinsou *would* hear) but a smile creeps up his lips.

"Midoriya," Shinsou says when Izuku reaches the top of the stairs. Izuku doesn't even look at him. He keeps his face smooth, calm, and impassive. It's one of the easiest things he's ever done. Shinsou doesn't scare him, not one bit. Even when Shinsou reaches an arm out, blocking Izuku from grabbing onto the doorknob to open the door, Izuku doesn't feel even a flicker of fear or nerves.

Izuku looks at Shinsou. He meets his gaze, steady and firm, so that Shinsou *knows* that Izuku isn't afraid of him, isn't nervous, and then Izuku reaches out. He grabs Shinsou's wrist with a firm hand and pulls it away. He feels some small satisfaction when Shinsou's face twitches into a scowl at Izuku's strength, and Shinsou takes a step back. Izuku opens the door to the dorm and steps inside, Kacchan behind him, thankfully quiet.

Izuku is strong. He wonders, sometimes, if others understand that. They only ever see him breaking down, freaking out in the aftermath of an ordeal they will never be able to witness. They see Izuku recovering from dozens of deaths for their sake, but they don't get to see him standing up to the villains, facing down death knowing he'll have to do it again. Izuku thinks that, maybe, his allies underestimate him. Maybe even more than Sasaki ever did.

When he steps into the 1-A dorm with Kacchan, he hears conversation die down around the television. Izuku walks over to the living area. He feels a strange thrum of pride under his skin. It's almost like anxiety, oddly enough--shaky and energetic and fiery--but it's different all the same. It pushes Izuku forward.

"M-Midoriya!" Uraraka exclaims as Tsuyu presses the pause button on the TV remote beside her. "How are you doing?" She freezes when Kacchan growls beside Izuku, but Izuku just smiles.

"I'm--I think I'm okay," he says. Izuku glances at Kacchan and hopes he gets the message. Izuku thinks he can answer a few questions right now.

Uraraka looks like she might faint from relief. "Oh, thank goodness!" she says. "We--when we saw you on TV, we really thought you were gonna die," she confesses, biting at her lower lip. Next to her, Tsuyu nods, and Izuku can see that Kirishima, Todoroki, and Kaminari, who are sitting on the other couch, all seem to agree, judging by the similar looks on their faces.

"It was quite a shock, ribbit," Tsuyu says. Izuku nods, feeling a bit sheepish.

“Ah, I don’t--I don’t actually know what exactly was on TV,” Izuku says, reaching up to rub the back of his head. “I mean I--I know about the livestream with--with me and Shinsou in it, but...” He trails off, but Tsuyu seems to understand, nodding.

“It makes sense that you wouldn’t know,” she says. “Aizawa said you just got out of the hospital today.” Izuku nods. Todoroki speaks from the other couch.

“Phosgene, the villain, broadcasted two videos,” he says. “One was the one you were in.” Uraraka nods.

“A-And before that, there was one with her and three other villains,” she says. “They didn’t say anything though, just her...” Izuku swallows. *The lieutenants?*

“She said that she was making her debut in Japan,” Todoroki says. “You can probably watch the video. It’s everywhere online,” he says, glancing down. “As is the one with you in it.” Izuku swallows.

“So, um,” he starts. “E-Everyone knows about--about Ace?” He winces as he says it. It feels like an admission, even though he’s perfectly aware that he was in his costume on *live television*. There’s no new information to reveal, there. Tsuyu and Todoroki nod in unison, but it’s Kaminari who speaks up.

“Yeah, dude,” he says, his face breaking in a small smile. “You, uh, kind of have a pretty big fanbase?” He shrugs. “And I might have ordered merch?”

“I told you that was a bad idea,” Kacchan says. Izuku can hear the scowl in his voice without even looking.

“The sweater looks really comfortable!” Kaminari protests. “And it’s not like it hurts Midoriya if I buy it, right?” Izuku can’t help the smile that creeps up his face.

“I think it’s--it’s funny,” Izuku says. Kacchan huffs in irritation beside him.

“Of course you do,” he says. “If they’re going to make merch, you should at least get paid for it.” He sounds genuinely angry, which is enough to make Izuku giggle. Kacchan just glares at him.

“I-It’s fine, really!” Izuku says. “It’s--it’s just a sweater,” Kaminari chuckles nervously.

“I, uh, also bought the action figure,” he says. Izuku chokes on his next breath.

“A-Action figure?!” He thinks he may be dreaming.

“Um, well, I-like I said.” Kaminari rubs the back of his head. “You’re kind of super popular?”

“I-I thought you guys would be mad at me,” Izuku says, shaking his head. “I mean I--I lied to everyone.”

“I’m only mad you wouldn’t admit that I was right,” Todoroki grumbles, although there’s really no heat to his voice. “I called it.”

“He really did, didn’t he?” Uraraka laughs. “And we thought he was crazy!”

“You did a really good job of hiding it,” Kirishima says. “You’re like, totally badass, Midoriya,” he says. He’s grinning wide, and Izuku can’t help but return the expression.

“Of course they wouldn’t be pissed off at you,” Kacchan huffs. Izuku looks over to him. “You

really are an idiot sometimes, Deku.” Kacchan nudges him with an elbow. Izuku nudges him back, grinning.

--

Izuku’s fine. Really. He’s felt great since he came back to the school. His friends have been supportive, nobody has asked him to do anything he doesn’t want to, and it’s been the weekend, so he hasn’t had to go to class or anything like that.

Everything’s been great, so it doesn’t make sense when Izuku wakes up in the early hours of the morning, his hands shaking and his breath coming too quick. He’s not having a panic attack; it’s not that bad. He didn’t have a nightmare, either, because there’s no whisper of a dream haunting the edges of his consciousness. Izuku just feels raw, like his nerves have been ripped open.

It’s too hot in his room. He throws the covers off of himself, the thin sheen of sweat quickly cooling on his skin as he hops from the bed to the floor. His arms are covered by long sleeves, but his legs become covered in goosebumps from the edge of his sleep shorts down. He still feels hot, and the thought of going outside occurs to him. It’s surely cold enough that he could die out there, although he isn’t certain he wants to. It’s an option, though. Izuku finds himself walking out of his dorm room, shutting the door behind him quietly.

He moves through the halls and down the stairs like a ghost. The thought of resetting is both nauseating and magnetic. Izuku’s died so much lately, so it’s not like *that* will be a novelty--if anything, it’s a negative. But to die *quietly*, peacefully, like a statue in the cold forest outside of the school? Untouched by villains, only hurt by the chill of the air, by his own choice? Izuku shivers at the thought, even though he doesn’t feel cold. He walks quicker, out into the common area of the dorm.

He freezes when his eyes meet Aizawa’s. His teacher is sitting on the couch that faces the stairs, wrapped in a blanket. There’s an open book in his lap. He looks surprised, like he hadn’t heard Izuku coming. His brows draw together.

“What are you doing up?” he asks. His voice is raspy, like he hasn’t slept. Izuku blinks.

“I was--I was just going to get some air,” Izuku says. Aizawa’s eyes flicker over him.

“Dressed like that?” Aizawa sighs, his mouth pressing into a thin line as he shuts the book in his lap. “Come here,” he says, gesturing to the couch. Izuku hesitates. He doesn’t really want to talk to Aizawa right now--he’s still busy being angry at him--but at the same time, he kind of wants the comfort his teacher is clearly offering.

“I--I’m okay,” Izuku says. Aizawa stares at him, his face flat.

“Monoma talked to me,” Aizawa says. “I didn’t ask him. He told me on his own,” he continues, his gaze shifting to the side. “I...” Izuku hears his voice crack. He realizes Aizawa is close to tears. “I failed you, Midoriya.”

“No,” Izuku says, quickly. “You--I kept it from you. You couldn’t have known.” Izuku moves over to him where he’s sitting on the couch. Aizawa shuts his eyes for a moment, opening them again as Izuku takes a seat beside him. Izuku feels bright guilt burning in his chest.

“Are you being serious?” Aizawa asks, laughing dryly. “You were fairly obvious about it,” he says, shaking his head. “You were practically *begging* for someone to help you, and I ignored it.” He pauses. “I sent you to the villains anyway. I thought you were suicidal and self-sacrificing, and

I sent you to them anyway.”

“I-I wanted to--” Izuku starts, but he stops talking when Aizawa meets his gaze. There’s fire burning in his eyes.

“Midoriya,” Aizawa says. “Don’t make excuses for me.” He breathes out, giving a sharp shake of his head. “There isn’t an excuse. Not for me, or for any of the other adults who were supposed to be responsible for you.” He swallows visibly. “All we can do is do right by you from now on.”

“I have to--I can’t just--” Izuku doesn’t even know what he’s saying. The words that come out of him sound weak. He’s not really sure what he’s arguing against.

“I don’t want to see anyone hurt you,” Aizawa says. “Including yourself,” he adds. His gaze drifts to Izuku’s arms, where Izuku’s self harm scars are. None of them are fresh, not right now. Izuku swallows.

“I... I have to train my quirk somehow,” Izuku whispers. *I don’t want to stop*, he thinks.

“We’ll find another way,” Aizawa promises. “One that doesn’t hurt you.” Izuku feels a lump build in his throat, but it’s a different sort than the one’s he’s been feeling so often lately. He nods, his head bobbing shakily. He doesn’t trust his voice right now. Instead, he leans forward, wrapping his arms around his teacher.

Aizawa seems surprised, not moving for a moment, but then he wraps his arms around Izuku, returning the hug. Izuku buries his face in Aizawa’s shoulder, hoping desperately that Aizawa can’t feel the soft sobs shaking Izuku’s chest as he cries. It’s the good, gentle kind of crying, the kind that makes Izuku’s heart feel like a knot being untied, like someone is reaching into his chest and smoothing out the tangles.

He can go back to being mad at Aizawa tomorrow, he decides. If he even still wants to, after this. For now, Izuku is content to hug his teacher and just cry.

Chapter End Notes

content warnings: talk of self harm/suicide

[discord!](#) [blnt carrd!](#) [personal carrd!](#)

thank u all again for the support and love!!!! and happy 1 year of this wild ride :D

a penny for your thoughts

Chapter Summary

last time: mouse hugs, aizawa hugs, everyone hugs!

Chapter Notes

HAPPY NEW YEAR GAMERS

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Izuku has his hand raised to knock on his mom's door when he hears the voices. They're not yelling--that would imply increased volumes--but they're definitely upset, and it takes Izuku a moment to figure out who he's listening to. *My mom and Aizawa-sensei?*

"He shouldn't have to go. He's out of this now--the villains know he's not one of them anymore, so there's no reason for him to be in meetings or put himself in danger at this point!" His mom's voice is firm, rushed. She sounds like she's close to tears with frustration.

"He has to debrief, at least," Aizawa answers, irritated. "We need the information he has. I'm on your side here, but--"

"But what? You think he should have to retraumatize himself so that the Commission can pressure him into going right back?" Inko snaps. Izuku winces. He places a hand on the doorknob, turning it slowly. He's sure they won't hear the sound of the door opening quietly over their... discussion.

"I'm not asking you to send him back into battle, Inko," Aizawa hisses, and Izuku isn't sure exactly when they'd gotten on first name basis. "It's just going to be sharing information he's *already* gotten. Information he had to give up a lot to get, so it should be *worth* something."

"Like that's what you people were thinking when--" Inko cuts herself off when Izuku steps into the room. She turns; he must have caught her gaze. Izuku can see the stricken, apologetic look on her face, and he hates it.

"It--it should be my decision," Izuku says. "I'm the one who's going, right?" Aizawa turns to look at him, too. His mom is wearing scrubs, probably from a shift earlier, if Izuku had to guess. Aizawa is in a t-shirt and sweats, his hair damp around his shoulders. They both look like they're in pain, even though they're clearly not injured. Izuku grimaces at the sight.

"The Commission meeting about the incident is in a few days," Aizawa says. "You don't *technically* have to be there, but I can't predict what information they'll want. I won't be sure I've asked all the right things beforehand. It's better if you go." His face is twisted in a frown. He's clearly not happy about it.

"You don't have to do anything for them anymore," Inko says, her voice firm as she shakes her head. "You don't owe them anything, Izuku. You say the word and I'll--I'll move you to another

school or another *country*,” she says. “They don’t deserve to speak to you,” she spits. Her face is fiercer than Izuku has ever seen it, her eyes flashing with grim determination. Izuku’s never seen her look like this. He swallows before he speaks, staring her down.

“I want to go,” he says. “It’s fine if it’s my decision, right?” Inko blinks, her brows dropping as she opens her mouth, then closes again before she finally speaks.

“Then I’m coming too,” she says. Aizawa makes a choked noise in his throat.

“Inko, you can’t,” he says. “You’re--you’re a civilian.” Izuku glances over to him briefly, his eyes flickering back to his mom when she snorts.

“Yeah, well, so was my son,” she says. “And then you let him die on the battlefield, over and over again.” Izuku swallows as Aizawa flinches, a full body motion like he’d been struck.

“Okay,” Aizawa says, squeezing his eyes shut for a moment. “Fine, you can come,” he says. “I’ll explain to the Commission. They’re not going to like it.”

“I hope they hate it,” Inko says, venom in her words. She stays like that for a moment, all wound up with tension and hate, before she seems to deflate, sighing. She looks at Izuku, her eyes shining.

“Mom?” Izuku asks, carefully. Inko sighs again, stepping forward, closer to him. She hesitates before reaching up and slowly brushing a stray lock of hair away from Izuku’s face.

“I wish you’d been able to tell me,” she says. “I wish... I wish you’d been able to tell *someone*,” she says, her voice barely more than a breath. Her eyes squeeze shut for a moment as her hand lingers on his cheek. She pulls back as she looks away, her eyes opening again.

“I...” Izuku trails off. His mom is trying not to cry; there are unshed tears gathering in her eyes. “I’m sorry, Mom,” he says softly. She shakes her head.

“I’m--I’m just so glad you have this quirk,” she says. “Isn’t that horrible?” She looks up at him, her eyes the same color as his. “I know it’s brought so many awful things to you, but--but you’d be dead for real if not for it, wouldn’t you? You’d be gone.”

Izuku blinks. He opens his mouth to reply, but he finds he can’t. He just nods. Inko mirrors the motion, reaching a hand up to swipe at her eyes.

“I’m just--Izuku, I’m so glad you’re *alive*,” she sobs. Izuku nods again, tears building in his own throat. He can still see Aizawa, off to the side, watching them, but he doesn’t turn towards his teacher. He steps forward, and he pulls his mom into a tight hug.

--

The dorm feels empty without all of his classmates in it. Izuku understands why he isn’t cleared to go back to class yet. He thinks it’s *stupid*, but he understands. He’s supposed to be recovering, or something, and even though he doesn’t really have any major physical injuries, the treatment for his quirk overuse (which the doctors had thought was anemia--Izuku wonders if the treatment would be the same, if they knew) was rest, food with lots of iron, and keeping all of his blood in his body. The last part had been mostly a joke, he thinks, but for Izuku, it’s actually kind of a fair point.

Of course, Izuku isn’t being left *alone* in the dorm. No, that’d be ridiculous. It’s not like Izuku’s saved whole cities or anything! He has to be babysat, since Neito went and told Aizawa he liked to hurt himself. And who better to babysit him but the *other* student who’s supposed to be resting?

Izuku supposes he shouldn't be quite so bitter. Maybe it's not *babysitting*, so much as that Aizawa hadn't wanted either of them to be alone. He'd also made it very clear that they should go to the staff dorm if they needed space from each other, since even though Izuku's mom is working in the infirmary today, whichever teacher has a free period at the time will be watching Eri and Mouse. Izuku had been tempted to just spend the whole time over there, but as much as he loves Mouse, he does want to work on his schoolwork today. Aizawa had told him it could wait if he was tired, but that there was no harm in getting a head start if he was feeling alright.

He'd said the same thing to Shinsou, who's been downstairs ever since. Izuku's stubbornly remained in the common area, not wanting to back down and go back to his dorm room just because Shinsou is down here. That, and it's not like he could *do* anything. Izuku doesn't really want to hurt himself, even though people seem to be convinced he does. He certainly hasn't missed the fact that all of the knives are mysteriously gone from the kitchen and that someone had gone through his room *again*, taking his weapons.

Izuku doesn't want to hurt himself. Really. He wouldn't mind training his quirk, just to keep up the progress he's made thus far, but there isn't the itch under his skin to dig into his skin. He would explain that to Aizawa, if he thought the man would understand the difference. At this point, he's starting to regret his own decision to refuse to answer questions, because he hasn't actually *explained* anything to anyone. He doesn't really know what they know, doesn't know what they think of it, and he hasn't had the chance to get people to understand that he's not *just* killing himself.

Because it had worked, hadn't it? Izuku reset how many times in the Tokyo base without more than some anemia? Compared to previous times, that was *amazing*. His training had worked, it had *really, really* worked. Izuku thinks he can even *feel* it, although he's pretty sure that's his imagination. There's no way he'd feel stronger from deaths that had literally been undone by time, right? But he can feel a strange power under his skin, deeper than the muscle, if he thinks about it.

Izuku's not really focusing on his schoolwork. It's in front of him, but his thoughts keep drifting off. The dorm is too quiet, even with Shinsou watching TV in the living area with the couches, close enough that Izuku can hear the anime he's watching. Izuku can clearly hear when Shinsou gets up off of the couch. It's not Shinsou himself that gives it away--he moves far too quietly for that. Instead, it's the creak of the furniture. Izuku doesn't lift his head from where it's angled to make it look like he's reading the textbook splayed open in front of him. He listens to the sounds of soft footsteps as Shinsou walks up to him, sees Shinsou's figure in his peripheral vision as he stops beside Izuku.

"You know why I had to do it," Shinsou says. His voice is quiet and flat. There is absolutely no inflection to it that would give away any emotion in anyone else, but Izuku has come to learn that, for Shinsou, it's a sort of defense mechanism. The dry, dull speech hides whatever it is Shinsou is afraid someone will hear in his voice.

Izuku does not reply. He does not try to pretend he has not heard, either. It'd be pointless, because Shinsou's close enough and the room is quiet enough that he couldn't have missed it. He simply glances over to Shinsou, making no attempt to school his features into anything but the half-scowl that his face forms. If it bothers Shinsou, he doesn't let it show. His face is impassive; if anything he looks bored.

"What was it that you said to me?" Shinsou asks, huffing out a breath of air. "Sometimes, to help someone, you have to do something they don't want you to." His eyes narrow slightly. Izuku just stares back at him.

After a long moment, Shinsou sighs, frustration evident in the way the breath comes out ragged, almost turning to a growl at the end. Izuku feels some small satisfaction that just not answering is irritating Shinsou, especially since he doesn't think it really compares to the level of avoidance Shinsou had towards him when Izuku told Aizawa *his* secret. Eventually, Shinsou seems to give up waiting for a reply, or at least gives up holding himself back--he reaches up, running a hand through his already-messy hair.

"You didn't outright say it, but I'm not *stupid*, Midoriya," Shinsou says, his voice quick and low. "I mean, come on. You--I know you had to have killed yourself to use that quirk." Izuku swallows. He'd known Shinsou knew--it was beyond obvious--but that doesn't make hearing the words easier. "You said it yourself, that you didn't want to keep going. If I hadn't said anything, it would have just been the same next time. It would have--" Shinsou reaches up, tugs at his hair. "It would have all just been on you, no matter who was there with you."

Izuku blinks. He'd resolved not to say anything, not to give in, but even if he hadn't, he'd be speechless right now. He's all but forgotten his frustration and petty spite towards Shinsou for the moment, forgotten his desire to make Shinsou feel that guilty irritation he'd felt after he had to reveal a secret. He just finds himself staring at Shinsou as he draws in a deep, shaky breath, uncurling his fingers from his hair and dropping his hand to his side before he speaks again.

"You know why I had to do it," Shinsou says. His voice is dulled again. Dry, expressionless. As if that does anything when his *face* says so much.

Izuku speaks without meaning to. "You know why I can't just get over it, even if I---even if I understand your reasons," he says. His voice is soft, and he barely stutters.

"I'm--I'm not going to feel *guilty* for helping you," Shinsou snaps. "I don't feel bad about it. I know I did the right thing." Izuku frowns.

"Then why are you asking for forgiveness?" he asks. It slips out without his permission, again, but before he has time to think about what he'd said, before he has time to react or add anything else, Shinsou hisses out a breath and turns on his heels. He's marching out of the room, up towards the stairs, before Izuku's mouth has even opened to tell him to wait.

The living area, even with the TV still cheerfully playing in the background, is too quiet without his presence.

--

"Do you think they'll let you go back to class soon?" Neito asks. He's shuffling his desk of cards, although they're not actually playing. Izuku thinks that Neito just likes having something to do with his hands. "It seems like you're well enough."

"I hope so," Izuku says, sighing. "I--I don't like being here alone all day." He knows he's pouting, but, well, he doubts Neito minds. Plus, he's watching the cards, anyway. Neito hums.

"I'd be bored out of my mind," he says. "Have you spoken with Shinsou at all?" The cards are certainly shuffled by now. Neito doesn't pause in his motions, or look up at Izuku.

"A bit," Izuku admits. "I don't--I don't really want to talk about it," he says. The conversation with Shinsou had left him unnerved, to say the least. He still isn't sure how he feels about just that night, let alone the whole situation--it's something he's not sure he'll *ever* have completely figured out.

Neito hums. “What *do* you want to talk about?” His voice is light, and Izuku relaxes. He swallows. There is something, but...

“Are you--is it okay if I talk about something kind of... kind of heavy?” He squirms a little in his seat on his bed. Neito glances over from him, pausing from where he’d been shuffling the cards. He’s sitting in Izuku’s desk chair.

“Of course,” he says. “But, if you’re planning on hurting yourself, I am going to tell an adult, this time,” he adds. His voice is firm, but not accusatory, not unkind. There’s neither a smile nor a frown on Neito’s face, just concern and interest. His blue eyes look almost grey, shadowed by his bangs.

Izuku breathes a sigh. “No, I’m--I’m actually okay,” he says. He’s not entirely sure how true it is, but at least in this exact moment, it’s close enough. He hadn’t been planning to say anything about something like that, anyway.

“Okay, good,” Neito says, relaxing just a bit. He turns so he’s looking at Izuku more directly. “I’m all ears.” Izuku nods, takes in a shaky breath.

“I, um.” Izuku bites at his bottom lip. “Sorry, I’m--I’m not sure how to say it,” he says. Neito doesn’t react, just waits. Izuku breathes in again, then continues.

“When I was at the--at the, um, the Tokyo base, I spent a lot of my time dying,” he says. Neito’s eyes widen slightly. He leans forward, resting his elbows on his knees as Izuku continues. “I needed--in order to get out, I needed information, and I had to--I had to die to get most of it,” he explains. Neito’s brow furrows slightly, but he nods.

“Is that normal for... for work you do as Ace?” He seems hesitant to ask, like Izuku won’t want to be interrupted, but Izuku doesn’t mind. Izuku nods.

“Yeah, just--just not this much,” he says. Izuku sighs, folding his hands together in his lap, feeling the pressure of his palms pressing together. “I call them resets, but they’re not usually--it’s not like I *do* anything, most of the time,” Izuku says, looking at the side, away from Neito. “I just... I die. For anyone else, it’d be the end, but I--I get another chance.”

“Like with Muscular,” Neito says. Izuku’s gaze snaps back up to him. Izuku nods, shaky. He’d almost forgotten. Neito understands this much, and he’s quite possibly the only person who *can*.

“E-Exactly,” Izuku says. “But I--I also do things like--like do stuff I *know* I can’t let stick. So that I get i-information I need to get through--to get past a certain point.” He glances down, at the floor. “Like, I might--I might taunt someone, or make them think that I--that I’m more powerful than I am. So that I can see how they react when--when threatened.” Izuku swallows, wets his lips. The words feel like they’re just rushing out, so he continues,

“And it--I’m not doing it to *kill* myself, but I can’t--if I mention my quirk to a villain, to confirm whether or not they’d already guessed it based on their surprise or--or lack thereof, I can’t--you know I can’t just--I can’t just leave that like that!” Izuku’s voice is shaking, now, rising in pitch and volume. “So I have to die! If I’m--if I’m gathering information stealthily and get caught, I can just--I can redo it! So killing myself, it--it’s not *always* just killing myself, or--or hurting myself.” Izuku draws in a shaking breath, opens his mouth to keep going, but Neito’s voice cuts him off.

“But outside of life or death situations, you shouldn’t have to do that,” Neito says. Izuku looks up at him, sees him frowning, his brows drawn low over blue eyes. “If you’re trapped in an enemy base and it’s the only way out, I mean *yeah*, but Izuku, you shouldn’t have to for missions that

aren't like that." He shakes his head. "I'm not saying you--"

"This isn't what I wanted to talk about," Izuku says, cutting Neito off. "There's--there's something else, but you--you just had to hear that, to understand." He pauses, watching as Neito opens his mouth like he's going to protest, then sighs. It almost looks like he's deflating as he nods.

"Okay," he says. "I'll listen." He looks like it's physically hurting him not to argue with Izuku, but he doesn't say anything else. Izuku's heart aches from how much he appreciates it.

"This last time, it--it was worse than normal," Izuku says. "I--Normally, I'm just--I can usually see the end," he says, his hands curling into fists on his lap. "I might not know the--the *exact* way out, but I--I have an idea, at least." He pauses. His fingernails bite into the skin of his palms.

"This time?" Neito prompts, his voice gentle. Izuku nods.

"I didn't just--I didn't just have no idea," Izuku says. "I--I knew it was probably pointless." He takes a breath, forces himself to hold it for a moment before he breathes out. "Sas--Phosgene wanted something from me that I--that's impossible for me to give," he explains. "So even if the only way out was--was giving in to her wishes, it wasn't an option. It was impossible, and things just kept--every reset, things kept going wrong. People kept dying, and--and Neito, I'd already died *so much* in there. For--just to get to that point."

Izuku looks up at Neito. His voice shakes when he speaks. "I didn't--I didn't want to do it again," Izuku says. "I didn't want to keep dying." His shoulders ache from tension. He watches Neito's brows twitch, watches his friend's face all but collapse.

"Oh, Izuku," Neito says, just above a whisper. "That's--of course you didn't want to." Neito twitches forward, as if to get up, but pauses. "Can I hug you?"

Izuku nods. Neito stands up smoothly, moving to Izuku and wrapping him up in a tight hug all in one motion. He's squeezing Izuku tightly enough for Izuku to feel the pressure in his bones, but it's not painful. If anything, it's grounding. Izuku wraps his arms around Neito's neck and shoulders, returning the hug, albeit a bit more gently.

"When I copied your quirk, I was afraid to die even once," Neito says. "Even just a handful of times. I don't think anyone could do what you've done, Izuku. Not without completely breaking. You... it's amazing, really." He grasps Izuku tighter. "That's part of why I'm always so worried about you; you know that, right?" He breathes out, shaky. "Even before you told me, just now, I knew that--that you were dying a lot. I didn't know it was so *much*, but I knew for sure it was more than anyone else would have been able to take."

Izuku shuts his eyes against Neito's neck. "But I can't stop," he whispers. "If I stop, who's going to--who's going to pay for it, Neito? Who's going to *stay* dead because I--because I couldn't stand it temporarily?" Izuku hears Neito's breath hitch--feels it, too, from where they're pressed up against each other.

"God this *sucks*," Neito says. Izuku can't help the little laugh that bubbles out of him at that, just a tiny little snort. Neito's hands tighten just the smallest bit around him at that, too, but Izuku doesn't mind.

"Aizawa said he's going to try to--to find a way that doesn't involve me dying," Izuku says. "Do you really think--is it possible?" He swallows around the lump in his throat. It doesn't sound possible. It's too good to be true.

"I don't know," Neito admits. "I want it to be." He loosens his grip, but doesn't let go. Instead, he drops his head down, resting his forehead on Izuku's shoulder. "It activated without you actually dying before."

"Yeah," Izuku says. "It's--it did it again, when me and, um, when me, Shinsou, and Leadfoot got hit with radiation."

"Radiation?" Neito asks. Izuku nods, although he's not sure if Neito can really tell in the position they're in.

"Maybe it--maybe it also activates if I'm dealt a fatal blow?" Izuku's uncertain. Neito hums into his shoulder.

"That's not a lot better than dying completely," Neito points out. He adjusts himself, pulling back enough to look at Izuku. He doesn't let go completely, though, although Izuku isn't going to say anything.

"If it--if it had other activation requirements, I would have noticed them by now," Izuku points out. Neito's brow furrows.

"What if dying isn't the requirement?" Neito asks. Izuku sighs, opens his mouth to argue, because that's what they've *just* been talking about, but Neito continues. "I mean, what if it's not the default way to activate your quirk?"

Izuku frowns. "What--what do you mean?" he asks. Neito chews at the edge of his lip, looking at Izuku with slightly squinted blue eyes.

"A lot of quirks have a sort of... fail safe, right? Like, they'll activate the normal way, but there are other conditions that trigger them," he says. "Like if the user is about to die, for example, the body--it throws out everything it can as a last-ditch effort."

"Like a final adrenaline rush," Izuku says. He pulls back from Neito just enough to wipe his palms on his pants. Neito's still practically sitting in Izuku's lap as he nods.

"Right," he says. "Or like my quirk--I can activate it on purpose, but if someone grabbed me and startled me, I'd almost certainly copy their quirk my mistake."

"Kacchan's quirk activates if he's too sweaty and there's friction," Izuku murmurs. "Or if--if there's a spark near his hands. It's not intentional, but it happens." He reaches a hand up to his chin. "Or Kaminari, when he's scared, he releases static electricity."

"Exactly!" Neito says, nodding. "But if your quirk is really subtle, or it's really really taxing to activate it, you'd never have been able to the normal way. I mean, that's how lots of people think they're quirkless, right?" Izuku nods, even though it's not really a question Neito needs an answer to.

"But when I'm about to die, my body is throwing everything it can at it, so it activates anyway?" Izuku asks. "It--it's possible, but that doesn't mean I'm going to be able to activate it otherwise."

Neito shakes his head. "It also doesn't mean you *won't* be able to," he says. "Most kids find out about their quirks because of an accidental use, not because they used it the way it works best." He meets Izuku's eyes, a determined look on his face. "You could learn to use it another way."

"Neito, I..." Izuku swallows. "I want it to work, I-I really do!" Izuku glances to the side, "But I--I tried everything, when I thought I was quirkless. I don't think--"

“You didn’t know what kind of quirk it was,” Neito interrupts. “And you didn’t have the resources you do now, with UA helping and--and someone who can copy quirks.” His cheeks flush very slightly at that, just a bit. Izuku wonders if he’s imagined it. Neito’s eyes blaze with blue fire. “You have nothing to lose by giving it a chance. What if you could turn back time without dying?”

Izuku stares at Neito for a long moment. “...Okay,” he says. His voice is quiet. “I’ll--I’ll try.” What he doesn’t say is that, even if he *could* turn back time freely, however much he wanted and whenever he wanted, he’s not sure he would *want* to. Would anything mean anything, if he did? His life and death already mean so little to him. Time and what really happened already get so muddled up, and that’s with this horrible, horrible restriction on his power. Would he really want to make it even stronger? Put even more of the order of the world in his hands?”

“Thank you,” Neito says, relaxing visibly, and Izuku swallows back his hesitation. He has to try, at least. To figure out if it’s even possible. If he can, and only if--then he can worry about what to do.

--

It feels odd to come to a meeting with his mother, of all people. Izuku isn’t sure if it’s a good idea, now that he, Aizawa, and Inko are walking through the mostly-empty halls of the school to where the meeting will be held, but it’s too late to back out. Izuku hadn’t said anything to protest it when Inko had brought it up, and now it’s happening. He just has to hope it won’t go too poorly.

Oddly enough, Izuku isn’t nervous. Well, he *is*, but he’s not as nervous as he might normally be. He’s not *afraid*. He hopes it’ll go well, hopes that Rivera won’t cause too much trouble, hopes that Izuku won’t have to talk with Shinsou too much, but he isn’t *scared*.

It helps that he’s wearing his Ace costume, minus the face coverings and the knives. There’s not really a reason to, but there’s also no reason *not* to, and the outfit is comfortable and also brings him a level of confidence that normal clothes won’t. Now that the public knows Izuku Midoriya and Ace are one and the same, he might as well embrace it.

The door to the meeting room is open. Izuku can hear the sounds of soft conversation coming from the room, but he can’t make out any words or tell who, specifically, is speaking. It’s reminiscent of the meetings just before the 28th, when he and Shinsou had gone, presumably, to help the Gekkeiju break into the prison and get All for One out. How wrong they’d been, about what the 28th really was. Izuku can’t help but wonder what else they’d been wrong about.

Aizawa is leading the way. He doesn’t hesitate as he steps into the room, and his figure blocks Izuku’s view for a few moments before he turns to the side, walking over to a seat between Tsukauchi and Mirko. There aren’t a ton of seats left, but Izuku spots two open ones, between Mirko and Nighteye. They’re close to the door, so Izuku and Inko don’t have to go far, and they’re directly across from Rivera and Koizumi. Rivera isn’t looking at them, adjusting a stack of files in front of him.

“Close the door behind you if you’re the last ones in,” he orders, voice low. Izuku swallows, turning to obey, but he catches sight of his mother’s face. She’s pale, her eyes wide and her lips drawn into a grimace, like she’s seen a ghost. Izuku closes the door, swallowing as Inko’s eyes flicker to him, then back to Rivera.

“I should have known,” she mutters. Rivera glances up from his papers, then startles, *flinching*. Coming from him, the reaction is so startling that Izuku almost jumps, too.

“You--What are you doing here?” Rivera asks, his face screwing up, his nose wrinkling in confusion. Izuku blinks. Inko crosses her arms over her chest.

“I’m here to make sure you don’t pressure my *son* into anything,” she says. “You seem surprised, but Izuku and I have the same last name, Jon.” She huffs out a breath, clearly frustrated. Izuku can see the line of tension in her body. *Jon?* It takes Izuku a minute to remember that Rivera’s first name is Jonathan.

“You went by your given name in America,” Rivera says, and there’s almost an accusing undertone to his voice. Izuku can see that his fingers are clenched tight around the papers he’d been holding, although only for a moment. Rivera seems to notice what he’s doing, and the stress leaves his body. A cold, impassive look comes over his face, and he nods to the two empty seats with a sigh. “...Have a seat, you two.”

Chapter End Notes

content warnings: talk of self harm and suicide

[discord!](#) [blnt carrd!](#) [personal carrd!](#)

sorry this cuts off at a weird part!!! i think the next scene is gonna b long, i need to outline it, and we were already at ~5k so i wanted to just. post heheh

strength

Chapter Summary

last time: izuku talks to his mom, shinsou tries to get his forgiveness, neito talks to him abt his quirk, and then there's some weird tension at a commission meeting

Chapter Notes

me when this took ages to get out and is kind of awkward but oh well

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Izuku really, *really* wants to ask his mom how she knows Rivera, but she's got a look on her face that says that'd be a bad idea. Plus, he's not sure he wants to ask in front of everyone else--he can tell, at least, that Aizawa and Mirko seem curious.

"You two know each other?" Koizumi asks, tipping her head to the side. "Ms. Midoriya, when were you in America? It's such a wild coincidence!" She seems excited, seemingly unaware of the tension. Inko gives her a friendly smile, although it's a little strained.

"You can call me Inko," she says. "It'll get confusing if both Izuku and I are being called Midoriya." Koizumi blinks. Izuku's a bit surprised, too, but it's Rivera who speaks, oddly enough.

"Are you sure?" he asks. "We can refer to your son by Ace." Izuku watches his mom's face drop back into a scowl.

"I'm sure," she insists. "And since when have you cared about making anyone comfortable?" Izuku winces at the words, but Rivera doesn't react. He just stares at her for a long moment, his expression unchanged, before he glances away, back at his papers.

"With the dramatics out of the way," he says, and Izuku can feel Inko bristling beside him, "I'd like to get the meeting started as soon as possible, now that everyone is here." He glances around the room, and Izuku follows his gaze. Nighteye, Mirko, Aizawa, Tsukauchi, Koizumi, Nezu, Rivera, and his mom make up the adults. Shinso, Izuku, and Haruta make up the students. Ren is missing, but that doesn't shock Izuku, not after she'd left with Miura.

"This is primarily a debriefing," Riviera continues, "as well as a regrouping. I'd like to have some plans in place for Phosgene's next move because, and let's be crystal clear, there *will* be one. She's not done just because she let go of Midoriya and Shinsou."

"She didn't *let go* of anything," Shinsou mutters. Izuku swallows. Rivera looks at Shinsou, arching an eyebrow.

"Would you like to start, then?" Rivera opens a file, reaching into his suit jacket with another hand and producing a pen that he clicks open. "Go ahead." He says it like it's a challenge--like if Shinsou has any problems with what Rivera said, it's on *Shinsou* to disprove it. Izuku swallows.

“She didn’t let anyone go,” Shinsou says, his eyes narrowing. “Midoriya got us out.” Izuku blinks. He sees Rivera arch an eyebrow.

“Just Ace, then? You had no part in it?” Rivera huffs a sigh, tapping his pen against his paper. “This would be easier if you started from the beginning and just told me what happened.”

“I doubt that’d be very useful,” Shinsou replies, muttering under his breath. Izuku swallows. It occurs to him that he doesn’t know what Rivera and Koizumi have been told--if they’ve been told anything about his quirk, at all. Izuku glances over to Haruta, who gives a quick shake of his head, silver hair shimmering with the movement. *They don’t know*. It’s a relief and not all at once.

“Then enlighten me,” Rivera says, frustration evident in his voice. Izuku swallows. He’s not sure, now that they’re here, if he *wants* Rivera to know. Part of him just *doesn’t*-- he’s spent so long keeping this a secret that he doesn’t want anyone to know who doesn’t already. Another part of him thinks it might be a bad idea. His quirk is powerful. Izuku has no illusions otherwise; if it wasn’t, he wouldn’t have survived up to this point. If he tells Rivera, what will happen to him? Will it be similar to whatever happened to Sasaki so long ago, whatever it is that Rivera did that’s made it so he blames himself for everything she does?

Izuku thinks that, if the situation were a little different, he *could* just... reset after. If Rivera acts poorly, demands Izuku be used as a weapon or locked up or... something. Izuku could just kill himself to undo revealing the secret. Now, though, Izuku’s not sure he’d be able to get away with it. Would Aizawa stop him? If Izuku explained, would his teacher see things the same way? Would he see Izuku’s quirk as a tool, a way to get another chance whenever things go wrong?

Izuku doesn’t know. His mouth is dry as Rivera and Shinsou stare each other down, neither saying anything. Izuku can tell that Shinsou is tense from the stiff set to his shoulders, the clenched muscles in his jaw. He wonders if that’s why Shinsou’s hesitating: because he’s not sure if telling Rivera is the right decision. Izuku almost laughs. It hadn’t stopped Shinsou, last time he’d told someone.

“You--you should tell him,” Haruta says, his voice quiet but sure. Izuku blinks, glancing over to him. Haruta’s looking at Izuku. “He--Rivera isn’t--” Haruta pauses, takes a shaky breath. “Won’t he find out a-anyway? If--if Sasaki knows, she--chances are good she’ll reveal it to--to everyone. Waiting isn’t going to--to help.” Haruta opens his eyes, biting at his lower lip. Izuku swallows then nods.

Haruta’s right. Izuku hadn’t been thinking about the fact that Sasaki knows about his quirk, but clearly, *someone* had. Waiting only means that Rivera finds out on *her* terms, not Izuku’s. Izuku swallows. Under the table, he wipes sweat from his palms, onto the pants of his Ace costume.

“I--I haven’t been entirely honest about my quirk,” Izuku says. He sees Aizawa look at him sharply, but Izuku’s looking between Shinsou and Rivera. Shinsou’s face is set in a grim line, while Rivera looks almost horrified. Izuku sees his eyes, dark green and aged around the edges, widen slightly as he grimaces.

“Go on,” he says. Izuku swallows. This is his last chance to take this back, to make a lie or something. He curls his hands into fists in his lap. *You’ve already told so many people. What’s a few more?*

“I--When I die, my quirk turns back time,” Izuku says in a rush. Rivera’s face doesn’t pale, not like Aizawa’s had. Instead, he blanches for only a moment before he turns just the slightest bit red, his temple twitching.

“And Phosgene already knows.” It’s not a question. Rivera grinds out the words through clenched teeth, the anger coming off of him in waves. Izuku nods, swallowing.

“She--she also--she has another quirk,” Izuku says, because why not get the worst news out of the way now? “She already met with All for One, and she can--she can take memories from people.”

Rivera stands up, slamming his palms down onto the office table in front of him. For a moment, Izuku thinks he’s going to yell, but he doesn’t. Instead, there’s a long, terrible moment where Rivera just stares at him, eyes swirling with rage and his face twisted up with anger. Izuku watches the man’s hands curl into fists on the table as he sucks in a frustrated breath before closing his eyes for a moment, seeming to steady himself. Izuku can see his mom getting ready to stand up, too, and he’s not sure what will happen if she does.

“Does she already have a memory of death?” Rivera asks. His voice is deathly calm. Izuku swallows.

“N-No,” he says. “And it’s--it’s impossible for her to get one.” Izuku watches as Rivera sighs in relief, the anger bleeding out of him as he collapses back into his chair.

“Midoriya,” Rivera says, raising his eyes to look at Izuku. “I’m going to ask you how, exactly, it’s impossible, but first I have another question. Are you aware of what her quirk’s range is?” Rivera looks... exhausted. Izuku frowns.

“No, it’s--I’ve always been close to her when she used it,” Izuku says. Rivera sighs, shaking his head.

“She can use her quirk on anyone within her line of sight or a radius of one hundred meters, whichever is further.” Rivera pauses. “I don’t think I need to tell you how dangerous that is.”

Izuku freezes. “That’s--her line of s-sight, that’s--” He shakes his head. “If she’s on open ground, she could--she could see eleven kilometers.”

“And if she were on a hill or, say, a helicopter, she could see even further,” Rivera says, his voice dark. “Now do you understand why, exactly, Phosgene has been a top priority criminal for so long?” He shakes his head, reaching a hand up to massage at his temples as he leans back in his chair. “The only reason--and I mean the *only* reason--she hasn’t killed *millions* is because she hasn’t decided to yet.”

“She was planning to--to nuke Tokyo,” Izuku says before he could think better of it. Rivera freezes again, stares at Izuku.

“I’m going to need you to elaborate on that,” Rivera says. Izuku swallows.

“She--she can’t anymore,” Izuku says. “I--The villain July, her quirk let her--it was basically a nuke,” Izuku explains. “But, um, Miura--Leadfoot--she helped us kill her. So Sasaki can’t use July’s power anymore.” Rivera’s eyes narrow.

“Leadfoot helped you?” he asks, arching an eyebrow before sighing. “Whatever. It doesn’t matter how, if July’s been neutralized,” he says, reaching a hand up and running it through his hair. “To think her quirk was something like that...”

“Threadbare is dead, too,” Shinsou chimes in. Izuku swallows as Rivera’s eyes move to him.

“Good,” Rivera answers. “Leadfoot’s doing as well?”

Shinsou hesitates, then nods. "It was Midoriya's plan," Shinsou says, then pauses. "Manami Furuya... she's dead as well." Izuku swallows. Rivera makes a noise in his throat.

"What?" he asks. "That's excellent news," he says with a sigh. "It sounds as though Leadfoot went on quite the rampage." His eyes dart over to Izuku, as if willing him to explain. Izuku clenches his jaw for a moment.

"I--I killed Manami," Izuku says, quietly. Rivera doesn't react outwardly; he doesn't seem shocked, oddly enough.

"Good," he says. "Her presence made the entire group easily twice as dangerous, if not more." One of his eyebrows raises slightly. "I don't suppose we've gotten lucky enough for someone to have taken out Fury or Void as well?"

Izuku shakes his head. "They--they were in the base when we left, but it was damaged," he says. "And, um, Sasaki was there too. I--I don't know if they're a-alive, but..." he trails off, but Rivera nods.

"It's unlikely for something like that to kill Phosgene, at the very least," he says, with a sigh. "An unfortunate reality of her physical condition is that she's rather... resilient, let's say."

"I can relate to that," Izuku mutters under his breath. He's not sure that anyone hears him until he realizes that Haruta is squinting at him, looking as if he's not sure if he should be laughing or not.

"Midoriya, how is impossible for Sasaki to obtain the experience of death from you?" Rivera asks, his gaze unreadable as he focuses on Izuku and Izuku alone. Izuku swallows.

"Her--the quirk she obtained, it only lets her take a memory if someone is--if they're actively using *their* quirk," he explains, worrying at his lower lip with his teeth. "I--activating my quirk turns back time. So even if she g-gets a memory, it'll get erased by the effect of my--of my quirk." It feels strange for Izuku to be discussing his own ability like this. Wrong. Like he's been transported to another dimension.

"It's a direct counter," Rivera muses. "If you were just recovering from death or generating another body or something along those lines, it'd be a far worse situation." He looks down to the files in front of him, flipping through them. "Of course, her having the ability to borrow memories from others is... troubling nonetheless."

"That's how she--it's how she knows about my quirk at all," Izuku says. "She--she used it on--on Haruta, since his quirk is a-always active," Izuku's gaze flicks over to Haruta, who swallows nervously. Izuku hates to point this out, hates to do anything that might get Haruta in trouble, but he feels like he has to. *If I tell him this, then there's a really, really good reason to keep you far away from the enemy at all times*, Izuku thinks as he looks at Haruta.

"Hm," Rivera grunts, brows lowering slightly as he seems to think. "Does she seem to have any control over which memories she selects?"

Izuku shakes his head. "No, I--I don't think she really has as good control over--over which one she inflicts, either," he says. Rivera nods. Even though he's looking at Izuku, it looks almost as though he's staring *past* him, at something very far away.

"Does it hurt her?" he asks, then immediately corrects himself with a shake of his head. "What I mean is, are there any physical signs? Do her eyes or nose bleed, or does she appear weakened or disoriented after using the new quirk?"

Izuku thinks back. He doesn't remember seeing it with the new quirk, but he *does* remember Sasaki using trigger, her nose, eyes, and ears bleeding afterwards. It had been the first time she'd ever given him a memory--even then, it had seemed strange, but Izuku had thought it was the trigger. He swallows.

"She... when she g-gave me memories, when she inflicted them back on me, it tired *me* out, but--but she didn't seem hurt by taking them, I don't think," Izuku says. "I've--I've only seen her hurt by her quirk when she used trigger," he says. Rivera's brows crease.

"Trigger has always done that to her," he murmurs. "She could have already had the ability, back then. Memories were never within her capabilities in America, not even on trigger, so it would make more sense." Rivera's lips press into a thin line. It's like he's not even talking to them. "If she's had it for that long, then she's really pulled the wool over my eyes this time."

"Uh, Rivera," Koizumi says. There's a hint of an awkward laugh in her voice. Rivera glances over to her, then clears his throat, glancing around the room.

"Excuse me," he says, reaching up a hand to run it through his hair once again. "I... This is, as I'm sure you're aware, a rather significant development." He swallows; Izuku can see his throat bob.

"Jon," Inko says, clearing her throat. Izuku glances over to her, and she doesn't look sympathetic in the slightest. Her eyes are narrowed as she glares at Rivera. "Is Phosgene one of those two girls?" Izuku watches as Rivera's jaw tenses and he suppresses a flinch back, away from Inko. He's staring at her with wide eyes, although it's clear he's trying to hide his reactions. Izuku wonders, with a shiver, if his mom *met* Sasaki, as a child.

"Yes," Rivera answers shortly. "You--you remember them," he says. Inko's eyes narrow further.

"Of course I do," she says. "I don't forget patients." She drums her fingers on the table in front of her. Izuku shivers. "She looks different now," Inko says. Rivera snorts.

"She was twelve," he says. "Of course she looks different now." He looks down at the table, and this time it's Aizawa who clears his throat to speak.

"Sorry, but Inko, you know Phosgene?" Aizawa's brows are creased. "How?"

Inko shrugs. "I worked at a hospital in America for a year while I was in training," she says, looking down at the table. Izuku knows that part; Inko talks about it a lot, even if she's never mentioned Rivera or Sasaki. "Phosgene and her sister were patients of mine."

Inko sighs. "They were there with a woman, their manager. Her name was--I don't remember, something American and nondescript. It's probably fake." Inko laughs, but it's bitter. "They told me the girls were called Daphne and Laurel. I should have known, especially when they had a manager and, well, when you showed up." Inko looks at Rivera. Izuku feels something slot into place in his mind. He knew Rivera had known *about* Sasaki for a long time. He knew he'd been *hunting* her for a long time. He didn't know he knew her *before* she was a villain. Before he was trying to catch her.

"Daphne and Laurel, huh?" Nezu says. He's been quiet this whole time--Izuku almost forgot he was there. Nezu chuckles. "I suppose the name of the organization makes sense, now."

"They changed aliases frequently, but those were the ones they had the most often," Rivera says. His voice is uncharacteristically soft, quiet. He's staring down at the table, and he takes a moment before he looks up at Inko. "Yes. Phosgene--Maiko Sasaki--is the same girl as the Daphne you

treated sixteen years ago.”

“And Laurel?” Inko asks. Izuku knows the answer already. His throat feels tight as Rivera takes a deep breath.

“Hotaru Sasaki. She’s dead.” He says it with no emotion in his voice and no expression on his face, but it’s clear nonetheless that the statement hurts him. Rivera swallows. “Four years after you met her.”

“What happened?” Inko asks. Her brows are furrowed, her lips turned in a frown, twisted with concern for a girl she hasn’t seen in over a decade. A girl that Izuku remembers from his greatest enemy’s memories, her twin who looks so very different from her.

Rivera closes his eyes, then stands up. “We’re done here,” he says. Inko makes a noise of protest in his throat, but when Rivera opens his eyes, they’re swirling bright, glowing green. They would look almost like Sasaki’s, but the color is different. Duller, somehow.

“Jon,” Inko says. Izuku swallows. There’s a warning there, something he doesn’t quite understand.

“We’ll meet again at a later date. I... I need to go,” Rivera says, and then he walks out of the room. If Izuku couldn’t see his eyes starting to glow, the air starting to stir strangely around him, he would think the man completely calm.

--

Izuku is uneasy, after the meeting. His mom wouldn’t answer any of his questions, brushing him and Aizawa off easily, like she’d practiced. Izuku had never seen her like that. She’s always been open with him, honest. She never lied, never hid anything. Not that Izuku knew about, anyway.

Izuku’s sitting on the steps leading to his dorm building. He should get up and walk the rest of the way in, really; it’s cold out, and he returns to class tomorrow. He’ll need a good night’s sleep to wake up early for classes, not that he’s ever really gotten enough sleep before school. For some reason, though, he finds himself unwilling to get up.

The concrete is cold and hard beneath him, so it’s not like it’s comfortable. It’s not *awful* either, though. His Ace costume is warm enough, and the wind isn’t really blowing right now. The chill is biting at the exposed skin on his face and wrists, but between the gloves and the sweater, he’s not too cold. Izuku doesn’t even have the excuse of wanting to stay out here to die; it won’t kill him, not with these clothes on and it being this temperature outside.

“I thought it’d be a little harder to find you.” Izuku blinks at the familiar voice. He looks up to see Maka standing in front of him, wearing a sweatshirt and jeans. There’s a bright red scarf scrapped around her neck, and her hands are stuffed into the pockets of her pants. Izuku stares up at her in bewilderment.

“Maka...?” Izuku can hear the confusion in his own voice. He’s not sure why she’s here, but it seems like she’d been looking for *him*.

“Haruta wanted me to come find you,” she says with a sigh, walking up the steps and plopping down about two meters from him. For anyone else, Izuku would think it was uncomfortably far for a one-on-one conversation, but for her, it’s unusually close.

“Is he--is he okay?” Izuku asks. As far as he knows, Haruta is done with the Gekkeiju, but Izuku isn’t sure what else he’d want to talk to Izuku about and he *had* been at the meeting. Maka arches an eyebrow at him.

“He’s fine, yeah,” she replies, like it’d been a silly question. “Seemed to have a lot on his mind after your meeting or whatever it is you do.” Izuku swallows. He’s sure Haruta has even more on his mind than Maka knows. Out of everyone in the meeting, only Haruta would know *everything* that *everyone* was thinking.

“That’s--he sent you so I couldn’t ask him what p-people were thinking,” Izuku guesses. Maka snorts.

“Probably,” she says. “Although, as much as he can be a wimp, he doesn’t tell other peoples’ secrets.” She looks at him. “You know that better than most, I think.”

Izuku swallows. “You--you--what do you mean?” Maka raises an eyebrow.

“You pretended to be quirkless and not a vigilante for how long?” she asks. Izuku relaxes slightly. *Haruta didn’t tell her about my quirk*, he thinks. *My real quirk, anyway*. Izuku hadn’t thought that Haruta would, not really, but it’s nice to be sure.

“Did--Do you know why Haruta sent you?” Izuku asks. Maka shakes her head.

“No,” she says. “He wouldn’t say.” She pauses for a moment, tipping her head back to look at the sky. Her curly hair has grown out a little bit, reaching below jaw for the first time since Izuku’s known her.

“D-Do you know who Rivera is?” Izuku asks. Maka hums.

“Mhm, vaguely, anyway,” she says. “Commission asshole.” Izuku swallows.

“He--he and my mom know each other, somehow,” Izuku says. “That’s--Haruta probably knows something he shouldn’t, so...” Izuku trails off. Maka glances at him. Her eyes, normally dark red, look maroon in the blue light of the night.

“Haruta knows lots of things he shouldn’t,” Maka says. “I doubt he’d want us to talk unless there’s a better reason than just that.”

Izuku stares down the steps, at the sidewalk that leads up to them. The trees cast sharp shadows on the concrete, dark shades of grey cut by the light of the moon. Off to the sides, where soft grass has been turned grey by the darkness, the shadows are broken and fuzzy. He swallows.

“Maybe he--maybe he thought I should tell you something else,” Izuku says. “Something unrelated to my mom or Rivera.” Maka doesn’t say anything. Izuku takes it as a sign to continue.

“He--he really hasn’t said anything about my quirk?” Izuku asks. He steals a glance at Maka. She shakes her head.

“I’m assuming, based on how you’re acting, there’s something *to* say,” she says, dryly. Izuku’s reminded of Shinsou, suddenly. He realizes that a lot of his friends, Shinsou, Kacchan, and Neito, are a bit rough on the surface. Maka is like that, too, albeit in a different way. Maybe that’s why Haruta sent her.

“A-A lot of people know now, but--but don’t tell anyone other than Ema and Haruta,” Izuku says. Maka nods. “I--I don’t just see the future. When I die, time--I turn back time.” It’s easier to say, now that he’s told people before. Izuku isn’t even really sure *why* he’s telling Maka. She doesn’t even blink, just tips her head to the side such a tiny amount Izuku almost misses it.

“Well, that’s a lot more powerful,” she says. “Makes sense that you’d want to hide it.” She looks

forward, reaching up a hand to cup her chin like she's thinking. "So that's why he wanted us to talk."

"What?" Izuku blinks. Maka isn't looking at him, her sharp red gaze focused in front of her, like she's concentrating on something else. He'd expected a more dramatic reaction, something about his mental health or about him having died, like he'd gotten over and over again. Maybe something about how dangerous this would be if it got into the hands of enemies, how he can't just go around dying anymore. Instead, Maka grins. She looks at him.

"I bet everyone is telling you that you can't use a quirk like that, yeah?" she asks. "That it's too horrible, that you shouldn't 'have to die' or whatever?" she asks, making air quotes with her fingers. Izuku blinks, nods.

"Y-Yeah," he says. "But it's--I don't--I don't *really* die," he starts to explain. Maka stops him, raising a single hand and shaking her head.

"Don't bother," she says. "I agree." Izuku blinks as she stands up. "I get it, now. Haruta's a genius."

"He--he is?" Izuku asks. He doesn't think he understands. He stares up at Maka as she walks up to him, offers him a hand. A bare hand--Izuku can smell her quirk, can feel its effects. Strangely, the fear doesn't seem to bother him. It's not any worse than genuine, real fear he's felt for a *reason*.

"Yeah," Maka says, a wicked grin on her face. Her eyes shine bright crimson in the light. "I bet you've got dozens of people coddling you right now. Even more trying to train you *out* of using your quirk. Trying to get you to avoid it as much as possible, right?"

"R-Right," Izuku says. Aizawa hasn't said as much plainly, but it's been clear. Izuku knows that even *Neito*, even *Kacchan* want Izuku to stop dying. Want him to stop using the quirk that's gotten him to this point, that's let him save not just his *own* life, but *thousands* of others. Izuku knows that his quirk is horrifying to others. He can't ignore it, just like someone can't ignore a painful, bleeding wound. He also knows that his quirk has done so, *so* much good.

"So you need someone who doesn't give a shit about that," Maka says. "You need someone who thinks that your quirk is awesome *because it's your power*. You need someone who gets that, no matter how horrific or strange, your quirk is still a part of you." She extends her hand further.

"Mine certainly isn't coming back from the dead, but, hey, it's certainly scared plenty of people away." Her lips are curved up in a grin.

Izuku reaches out and takes her hand. Her skin is warm, and her grip is firm when she pulls him up into a standing position.

"Don't let other people's fear take away what makes you strong," Maka says. The grin on her face is so fierce it's contagious. Izuku can't help but smile back.

--

The next morning, Izuku wants to do nothing more than hunt down his mom. He'd really like to find her and ask how, exactly, she knows Rivera. He wants to ask what she knows about Sasaki, what Sasaki had been a patient for, what *happened* all those years ago. He wants to ask so many questions, but it's Monday. It's the day he goes back to school, and as curious as Izuku is, he doesn't actually want to ditch his first day back.

It's a little silly that he's anxious when he returns to the 1-A classroom. Izuku's died multiple

times. He's been tortured. This isn't even the first time he's come back to class after having been gone, after having been captured. He thinks that part of it is because his classmates know, now, that he's *Ace*, but part of him also thinks that that makes it easier. He doesn't have to lie quite as much, and it means that they'll be distracted by *that* rather than trying to dig out information on the things they don't know yet.

Izuku's still nervous when he settles into his chair in the classroom. He and Kacchan arrive early. They hadn't spoken about it in advance, but Izuku knows that Kacchan wanted him to have a chance to get settled so he can deal with his classmates one by one, instead of having to walk in on a room already full of them. Izuku's already spoken to most of them, of course, but he hasn't been back in *class* yet, and he's sure that they still have more questions. He thinks even Kacchan has more questions, judging by the way his friend is giving him the side eye from where he's sitting. Izuku doesn't look at him.

Izuku almost wishes, at this point, that he didn't have to come to class at all. He doesn't see the point. He gets that he still hasn't learned things like English and math, sure, but will he really need it for what he's going to do? And hasn't he proven he's good enough at being a hero already? Isn't his field experience better at teaching him anyway? Izuku likes his classmates. He really does. It just feels stupid to have to come back to class after everything. Even more so, after talking with Maka.

He'd thought about it, of course. He hadn't been able to sleep. Even though right now he's not working with the Gekkeiju and he's "benched" from Ace work (although he really doesn't plan on waiting much longer to go out again, no matter what Aizawa says), he's just not used to sleeping through the night. He'd spent plenty of the early morning hours staring up at the ceiling, thinking.

He wasn't afraid of his quirk. He thinks he might have been, at first, but even then, he wasn't *really* scared. He was curious, if anything. His quirk involves death, is wrapped up in it intimately, but the power itself doesn't kill him. It's the opposite--it *saves* him. Izuku's been so focused on the fact that his quirk activates upon death that he had almost forgotten what it *really* does.

It turned back time. Or, that's what it seemed like, anyway. Izuku supposes it could be making alternate timeline, but he just... it doesn't *feel* like that. It feels like an unwinding, a *tugging* back through time. Like he's being dragged through something thick and syrupy. Like a hundred little hands are pulling his being back, back to safety.

Aizawa and his mom and everyone else had been so horrified when they heard. Izuku remembers Aizawa going pale. He remembers his mom being so angry that it meant he'd died. But... Inko had also said it meant he was still there with her. Izuku thinks that's the more important piece. More important than anything after.

Izuku's first death hadn't been at his own hand. It hadn't been something that was the product of his quirk or something reckless he did because he knew he'd be saved, either. It'd been pure, nasty luck. Izuku was the unlucky victim, in the wrong place at the wrong time. He got in the way of a villain looking for prey, and he died because of it. That was it.

What would have happened, if he truly was quirkless? Izuku wouldn't have saved Kacchan from the villain later, that's for sure. He wouldn't have become Ace. Wouldn't have saved the people from Porcupine, wouldn't have saved the little girl from the portal dude. Wouldn't have even *heard* of the Gekkeiju. He wouldn't have gotten into UA, because he'd be dead. Would Sasaki have been unchecked? Would the heroes *ever* rescue Ren or Mouse? Would Sasaki have managed to use July to destroy Tokyo and even more?

Izuku doesn't know. He can't know. But what he does know is that he wouldn't have been around

to save the people he did. Mouse's life would have been a lot worse if it wasn't for him. Ren's and Miura's, too. All of those civilians he saved. So what if he died? Izuku *comes back*, and nobody else has that luxury.

As his classmates begin to filter into the classroom, Izuku greets them with a smile. He raises his hand in waves and replies to their questions about how he's doing, but he isn't really thinking about the interactions. He's thinking about what's to come. He's thinking about what he'll do next.

Because if Izuku knows one thing, it's that Sasaki isn't going to hold back. She isn't going to roll over and go down quietly just because her last plan failed.

And if she isn't going to hold back, why should Izuku? Because his quirk, his quirk that has given Izuku, terrified, weak, *quirkless* Izuku power and strength and life and endless second chances scares *other people*?

It's a stupid reason. Izuku doesn't want to let other people die because it might make someone *uncomfortable* that he's using his quirk to fight. He doesn't want other people to suffer because his teacher or his friends decided he was too *unstable* to use this gift.

When Aizawa walks into the classroom, his eyes go to Izuku. There's an unspoken question there, asking if Izuku's okay. If Izuku can *handle* being in class. Aizawa's always seen Izuku breaking down, crying and weak after countless resets. Aizawa never sees Izuku fighting. He never sees Izuku's strength, just the aftermath of it.

Izuku gives him a grin, bright and determined. He hopes it looks something like Maka's. Aizawa stares at him for a long moment, blinks, and turns to start class.

Chapter End Notes

content warnings: implied/referenced child abuse, references to past character death

[discord!](#) [blnt carrd!](#) [personal carrd!](#)

:D i hope u enjoyed and sorry if dis chapter seemed awkward lolz i am a shrimp my tiny claws are bad for typing

twinflower, part 1

Chapter Summary

last time: several people talk to izuku abt his quirk, but they all seem to have different takes on it. maka accepts it, neito thinks it doesn't have to involve death, and rivera is worried about sasaki getting her greedy little hands on it. oh, and rivera knows inko.

Chapter Notes

sorry i suddenly stopped updating, my brother got me into genshin impact and i have gotten to AR 40 in 2 weeks and also i no longer sleep i only grind. there is no room for anything in my mind except gaming. (also the semester started and this chapter was awkward to write lmao)

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Izuku's pulling on the blazer of his school uniform when he hears the frantic knocks on his door. He pauses, adrenaline rushing through his veins as his fingers stutter on the buttons of the coat. For a brief moment, he's afraid that the school is being attacked, like the USJ was so long ago. Images of his friends and teachers injured flash through his head before he hears Shinsou's voice, rough and desperate.

"Midoriya," he says, and Izuku forgets that he's angry with him for a moment. He sounds frantic-- something's wrong, something's *really wrong*.

"Shinsou?" Izuku's voice comes out as a surprised yelp more than anything. He moves to the door. He's already pretty much dressed, even if he doesn't have his tie or shoes on. He unlocks the door and tugs it open to see Shinsou, pale and sweaty with a grim look on his face.

"Come downstairs," Shinsou urges. "Sasaki's on TV. She's talking about--about you." His voice is low, dark. Izuku swallows. He nods, stepping past Shinsou to run to the stairs, taking them two at a time even in his socks.

"Is she going to set off a bomb again?" Uraraka's voice floats up the stairs, worried and loud. Izuku swallows as he slides into the room.

"Probably not," Todoroki says. "This seems more... directed." Izuku meets his gaze as the other boy looks up. Izuku swallows. Todoroki nods to the television, which seems to be turned to a news channel.

Sasaki's face takes up most of the screen. She looks... haggard. She's wearing the elaborate gold jewelry Izuku's seen her in so many times, but there's a dark bruise on one side of her forehead, spreading onto her temple. The horn on that side, once curved and dramatic, is cracked off at the tip. Izuku can see that there's bone inside, underneath the black outer material. Despite the fact that it's surely painful, there's no bandaging at all on her broken right horn or on the scratches and scrapes scattered on her bare shoulders and hands, which are visible when she gestures as she talks.

She's wearing a black dress, made of something gauzy and layered. Izuku can't see much other than the sleeves.

"Izuku Midoriya stole my daughter from me," Sasaki says to the camera, and Izuku shivers at the memory of killing Manami. "So I'm going to be sure that he suffers just as much." The edges of her lips are quirked in a smirk. It doesn't look quite real.

"Her--her daughter?" Kirishima asks from a couch. Izuku doesn't answer.

"She was a villain too," Shinsou says. Izuku's not sure if he's grateful to him or if he wishes everyone would stop talking altogether.

"Was my sister not enough?" Sasaki hisses, her voice suddenly much rougher, less controlled. She leans forward, like she's getting too close to the camera. "Was she not *satisfying* enough for you people? Did you have to turn one of my children against me and slaughter another?" There's a rustling, a murmured male voice. Izuku shivers. He can't make out the words, but he's sure it's Fury.

Sasaki sighs, leaning back. He can see, now, that the wing on her right side appears to be injured, too, although it doesn't look broken. Izuku can make out some ripped and shredded feathers, but there's no blood, and Sasaki doesn't seem to have any issues moving it; she ruffles her wings before she continues like she's collecting herself.

"This is a declaration of war," she says, looking at the camera with too-bright eyes. The TV screen can't really capture how green they are in person, but Izuku knows. The memory fills in the gaps for him.

"Izuku Midoriya is immortal," Sasaki says, like it's nothing. Izuku feels cold ice pool in his stomach and a roar of blood in his ears, but her next words are perfectly clear. "No matter how many times I kill him, he simply turns back the hands of time and tries again, hoping the result will be different." She laughs. There's no amusement in it.

"So I can't kill him," she says, with a shrug. "Not for real. But I can certainly make him suffer." She grins, wide enough to show her cat-like fangs. "I'm going to kill him so many times that he forgets what it's like to live, and then I'm going to hunt down everyone he cares about and kill them, too."

"Midoriya," Shinsou says. Izuku ignores him. The other students are talking to him, too, but he's ignoring them. He's watching the screen. He's watching Sasaki. He needs to hear this.

"I'm certainly a villain," she says with a shrug, glancing to the side, eyes half-lidded. "But are they heroes? The men who made me, did they have the best interests of humanity in mind?" She looks back at the camera, her eyes wide, like she's really asking. She looks like a child begging for a bedtime story. "It was so important to the *heroes* that I was kept secret that you didn't even know about me until I was bombing Tokyo!" she exclaims, laughing and clapping her hands together. "I was going to kill so many more, did you know that? You could have been evacuated! You could have been warned, at least. But I'm their mess to clean up. I'm a *mistake*. Heroism created me, you see." She shuts her eyes for a moment, chuckles before she opens them.

"And now they'll send the child soldier they used to kill my daughter to fight me," she says, a sad smile on her face. "The one thing Izuku Midoriya and I have in common is that neither of us really had a chance, huh?"

The feed abruptly clicks off. There's a long moment before the news company seems to regain

control over their own channel, and a reporter appears on screen, talking rapidly about what Sasaki had just said. Izuku isn't listening. He's not listening to the words of his classmates, either.

He turns and walks back to his room.

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Rivera looks like he hasn't slept since the last meeting. To be fair, Izuku basically hasn't, either. It's only been two nights, after all, and Izuku hadn't been able to sleep soundly through either of them. He's sure he looks better than Rivera, though. There are dark bags under the man's eyes, and his hair is greasy. He's dressed nicely enough, though, his suit neatly pressed as usual.

"Are we ready to get going?" Koizumi chirps from beside him. She doesn't seem bothered in the slightest, although Izuku isn't surprised. This case has never seemed personal to her. He doesn't blame her. From what Izuku can tell, Koizumi just handles the paperwork and comes to meetings. She doesn't seem to go on the field or anything. This probably isn't *real* to her the same way it is to everyone else.

"I believe it's best to start as soon as we can," Nezu answers. Today, he's seated close to Izuku. Only Aizawa is between them. On Izuku's other side, his mom is next to him. Next is Haruta, then Shinsou, then Tsukauchi. Koizumi and Rivera are next, then Nighteye and Mirko. Then it's Nezu again. Izuku wonders if it's intentional that he and Rivera are always facing each other down like this.

"I assume you all saw the broadcast," Rivera says. His voice is rough. Heads nod all around the table. Izuku tenses his jaw in preparation to speak, but Mirko beats him to it.

"All of Japan's seen it by now," she scoffs. Izuku swallows. He's watched it over a million times. It's disorganized, rushed--Sasaki clearly doesn't have a memorized script. It's sloppier than he'd expect from her. Except, it's still damning. Even though the terms she used to describe his quirk are *vague*, he knows even without looking that the internet and news must be buzzing with speculation. That much of the guesses will be close enough to the truth that the small differences won't matter.

"So much for--for keeping my quirk a secret," Izuku says under his breath. He means to say it as a joke, but it comes out so bitter that the attempt doesn't really land. He knows he sees Haruta's dark blue gaze on him, along with Nighteye's golden stare. He clenches his hands into fists in his lap.

"It's becoming abundantly clear that secrecy is more harmful than helpful in this case," Nighteye says. His voice is even, but kind. "Even though it appears it would have been revealed regardless, I for one am grateful you trusted us with the truth about your quirk before you had no choice in the matter."

The words feel empty. Izuku shrugs and nods. He doesn't make direct eye contact with Nighteye, tells himself that it's only because his eyes are the same golden color as Fury's and not because he's embarrassed by what the hero just said. From closer to Izuku, Nezu clears his throat.

"I agree with Nighteye," he says. "It seems as though Phosgene is actually privy to *more* information than we are." His gaze slides over to Rivera. Despite the perpetual smile on his face, it looks eerily threatening. "More information than I have, anyway."

"I--I had good reason not to tell you," Rivera says. He's scowling, his eyes narrowed as he stares at Nezu.

“And now you have good reasons to share with the class, as it were,” Nezu replies, voice smooth. Izuku feels a burst of appreciation for his principal. As much as he hadn’t trusted the UA staff earlier on, they’ve proven to be the most trustworthy of the adults he knows. Not that the bar is *particularly* high, but it’s something.

Rivera presses his eyes closed for a long moment. He looks much older than he must be, for a moment. Izuku wonders his true age--if, sixteen years ago, he was already working with Sasaki and her sister, he must be around Izuku’s mother’s age, but he could be much older.

“Inko could probably tell you a lot of it,” he says, after a long moment. Inko makes an affronted noise in her throat.

“No, I *couldn’t*,” she says. “You didn’t tell me anything, even back then.” Izuku hears her sigh, but it’s probably too quiet for the rest of the table to make out. “And what you did tell me was quite frankly probably full of shit.” Rivera stares at her. His face is blank for a long moment before he sighs, looking down. It’s Koizumi who speaks, though.

“Um, I understand that this is...” she trails off. Izuku looks up to see her biting her bottom lip. “What I mean is, is this relevant to the Phosgene case? Because--because if not, it might--you may want to talk about it later...” Koizumi frowns. “Not that I don’t think this stuff is important too! But she did kind of declare war on us, so--”

“It’s relevant,” Rivera says, cutting her off. Koizumi blinks.

“Oh,” she says. “Sorry.”

“It’s alright,” Aizawa says with a sigh. “But she’s got a point. Can we get on with it? The stakes just got raised.” The teacher has been quiet the whole time, but Izuku’s not exactly surprised to hear him speak. He’s been looking like he’s about to jump in for a while now.

Rivera nods, shutting his eyes. “It’s a long story,” he says. “So you need to be patient, and you need to listen, or I won’t bother to tell it at all.”

“Jon,” Inko says, her voice reproachful. Rivera shakes his head, eyes opening to glare at her with dark green irises.

“I’m not saying that to be difficult, or to be an ass,” he says. “There are a lot of... factors, that came together to create Phosgene as she is now. It’s going to sound like I’m making excuses at some points, or like I’m--like I’m softening things, or exaggerating them.” He takes a deep breath. “I’m not. There’d be no point. It’s not as if I want forgiveness now, after all this time.”

Haruta makes a little squeaking noise of surprise. Izuku glances at him, eyes widening, but Haruta just shakes his head before his ears twitch back in the direction of Rivera. *What did you hear?* Izuku thinks. Rivera sighs. He seems to either have not noticed Haruta’s reaction or to simply not care.

“I grew up in America, obviously,” Rivera says. “Most of you probably don’t know, but things are a little different there, with how quirks are managed.” He pauses, fingers trailing on the surface of a closed folder in front of him. “Legally, mostly. Especially when I was growing up. Nowadays, they don’t differ quite so much.

“The... the organization that I worked for before Hotaru died and I quit didn’t start their experimentation with the Sasaki twins. They started small, like most things do. I assume they branched off of another company, originally, but I never dug that deep into things, not even when

they hired me.” Rivera reaches up, adjusts his shirt collar. “Please understand I’m sharing this not to garner sympathy. This--this wasn’t so uncommon as it would be here, and even if it was, it’s not quite so bad as it sounds.” Izuku has a horrible feeling he knows what he’s going to say before he says it. Rivera glances up, his gaze sweeping across the room.

“I was a participant in a human quirk experimentation study as a child,” he says, plainly. “The organization obviously didn’t release the information publicly, but my parents were given a report as part of their compensation. The study didn’t see a significant difference between the control groups and the experimental group, but, well, I had the strongest quirk of the experimental group.” His gaze slides to the side, not really looking at anyone. “You can take that as you will.

“It’s how I’d heard of the company, and as I was in university, I’d taken it upon myself to try and find out more information. Quirk regulations were lighter in America, and as I’m sure you’re aware, quirks from that region of the world tend to also be stronger in general. Of course, this is due in no small part to the human experimentation that’s gone on, I’m sure,” he breaks off to chuckle, although Izuku doubts he actually finds it funny. Aside from Rivera’s voice, the room is deathly quiet.

“I suppose I attracted their attention. When I graduated with my bachelor’s, I was offered a job with a... rather *ludicrous* salary for someone just out of college. I was also told I’d be able to access the classified information on the study I’d been in, which is exactly what I’d been trying to get at for the past couple of years, so,” he shrugs, “of course I accepted.”

“That didn’t seem suspicious to you at all?” Shinsou asks, incredulously. Rivera raises an eyebrow at him.

“Of course it did,” Rivera says. “But what were they going to do, experiment on me again?” He laughs, shaking his head. “My parents had both passed away at that point, of natural causes. I was done with school with a fairly useless degree, and the only thing I was marginally interested in is figuring out why, with neither of my parents having quirks that could do much of *anything* and the study supposedly not having any meaningful results, I had such a powerful ability. So I said yes. I figured I would work until I had a few years of experience to put on a resume, and then I’d quit.”

Rivera sighs, suddenly looking very tired. “I liked the work,” he says. “It wasn’t what you’re thinking. I didn’t kidnap kids or anything. Most of the organization’s work was actually charity. Compassionate care for terminal illness, research into debilitating diseases. That sort of thing. I mostly did paperwork at first, until I was promoted over and over again and found myself in a director position, where my job became telling people to tell *other* people to do paperwork and computer work.

“It was... about 23 years ago, when things changed.” Rivera pauses for a long moment. “They would have been about five. I--I got promoted again, but it was a confusing promotion. I had a higher position and higher pay, but fewer subordinates. It seemed too good to be true, but I didn’t question it. At that point, I thought that the company had hired me because they felt guilty for experimenting on children. I didn’t suspect anything else.” He laughs dryly.

“I was put down as a *resource director* for a project Twinflower. I’d learn later that it changes names often, but at that point, I’d never even heard of it. It was strange. I thought I knew so much about the company.” He shakes his head. “Even then, I hadn’t met them yet. I wasn’t trained or anything, just suddenly given access to some of the case files.

“I thought it was a joke at first. And then I kept reading, and it became clear it was not a joke. The company I had been working for since I graduated university, for what was really my *entire* adult life, had never actually stopped experimenting on children. It seemed that they’d actually escalated

matters.” Rivera sighs. “It... it did not horrify me as much as it maybe should. But the case files painted the situation in a different light than I’m sure you all see it now. Clearly things were not as wonderful as they seemed on paper.

“I met the girls once that first year. Just once.” Rivera pauses for such a long moment that Izuku wonders if he’s done, if that’s it, before the man suddenly resumes. “I didn’t plan out their training directly, or anything. I was the boss of the boss of all their staff. Their manager’s manager, so to speak, although they had many *managers*, not all of whom were directly under my purview.

“Maiko, the one who would become Phosgene, never spoke to me. She’d talk to her sister alright, would ask pointed questions and give me a nasty side eye, but she wouldn’t say a word to my face. Hotaru always did the talking for the both of them, even though it was abundantly clear Maiko was in on the decision making just as much as Hotaru was.” Rivera shakes his head. “I was promoted to that position because they’d just lost their mother, you know. I expected a couple of grieving kids, not...

“Not soldiers,” he finishes, raising a hand to run it through his hair. “For all intents and purposes, they didn’t seem to care one bit that their mother was dead. They just didn’t want me to mess things up, make things worse for them, and they resented that their lives might change for the worse.” He shrugs. “For the most part, I tried to stay in the background. They didn’t look like children. Physically, sure, but the way they acted... it was like they were machines. Snarky, bratty little machines, but machines nonetheless. They didn’t care about death or other people. Just each other.

“I didn’t understand that, not then. It didn’t occur to me, in my foolishness, that that was a red flag and not a green light to step back and let things continue on as they had been.” Rivera sighs again, the kind of bone-weary sigh that makes Izuku want to also sigh in sympathy. “I hardly even dealt with them. I barely even touched files with their names on them.

“Until there was an accident,” he says. Izuku swallows. “They were seven. Their manager and handler at the time was in a car accident. They were in the vehicle, but they were both uninjured. It was... it was well and truly an accident, through and through. The organization, after the fact, thought it may have been an escape attempt, and I’ll spare you the details of the investigation that followed, but suffice to say it was not.

“I was the person in charge of the case aside from the woman who was both their manager and handler. It was technically part of my job from the beginning, and I knew that when I got the call, they’d be staying with me for at least the night.” He shakes his head. “They’d only met me *once*. I was a stranger to them.”

“After that night, any time there was an accident with one of the girls, any time they were injured or ill, the other would ask for me to be there. I didn’t technically have to be, not after another manager was hired, but... I also didn’t have any reason to say no.” Rivera looks uncomfortable. “They didn’t act like it, but they *were* children. I didn’t want to tell them no, and even though all I ever did when they called for me was stand around and glare at the hospital staff or yell at their handlers, it seemed that they appreciated it. Or something. They were hard to read. I never had any kids or younger siblings, so I wouldn’t know how to tell what a child was thinking.”

Inko speaks softly, interrupting his story. “That’s why you were there that day,” she says. Rivera glances up at her, then nods.

“They were about eight when Maiko got heatstroke during a training exercise. Hotaru called me to meet them at the hospital, which I did.” Rivera glances down. “I’m sure you’ve put it together, but this is the memory that Maiko has turned into her signature move. They were training in a wheat

field. I wasn't there when they were training, but when I got to the hospital, I could smell the green wheat on Hotaru clearly. I won't forget that smell. I know Maiko hasn't.

"She was fine, obviously. I met Inko there. She was one of the nurses that treated them." Rivera chuckles and shakes his head.

"I thought you were their father," Inko says. "Even though you were a little young to have girls that age."

"Right," Rivera says. "She was pissed at me, especially when the girls were whisked away by the company and they had her sign an NDA. Standard protocol, except--"

--except they were obviously being exploited," Inko finishes. "Quirk experimentation had been outlawed in Japan for years, and even if it wasn't technically illegal in America yet, it was still child abuse, which *was* illegal. Same with child labor."

"I'm fairly certain you used almost those exact terms back then," Rivera says. There's a small smile on his lips. "We got along well. Hotaru and Maiko liked her quite a bit, too, I think because she wasn't afraid of them, what with their mutations and all. That sort of thing wasn't common."

"You say we got along well, but all we really did was argue," Inko says. Rivera nods.

"That's true enough. Inko is a large part of why it occurred to me to change the way I was handling things with the girls to... take on a more active role. We weren't in the same area for very long, a month or two at most, but we--we talked a lot at the time." Izuku gets the distinct impression from the way Aizawa's eyebrow arches up and Haruta's face is slightly red that Rivera and his mom did a little more than just *talk*, but he decides not to think about that for the sake of his sanity.

Rivera sighs, then continues. "Anyway. After the girls were shifted to the next location for training, I started to show up to training, too. They were skilled. It became clear that *training* was a thinly veiled excuse to abuse and harass them into something that was supposed to resemble obedience. I'm no child psychologist and I'm *certainly* no parent, but it didn't really seem prudent, either for their well-being or for their continued development as heroes." He shakes his head. "So, I moved for them to transition from training to field work. Actively serving as heroes."

Aizawa makes a sputtering noise. "Wait, they--didn't you just say they were *eight*?" Izuku swallows as Rivera nods, his gaze shifting to Aizawa.

"The transition itself took a few years, mind you," Rivera says. "But I judged it to be less risk to them than continued training would." He pauses for a long moment. "The Sasaki twins were a very expensive, very long-term investment. The company wasn't going to send them on dangerous missions, not unless success was certain, so the majority of their missions were, for lack of a better term, crowd control." Rivera sighs. "They were to use their powers to calm upset civilians during clean-up efforts or after false alarms. Either way, it was after any real danger had passed."

"By... inflicting positive emotions on them?" Izuku asks, tentatively. Rivera nods.

"Correct. Hotaru was significantly better at it than Maiko, to the point where Maiko began to receive... punishments for failing to use the right experiences." Rivera looks uncomfortable. "She... didn't seem to be willing to use her quirk in that way."

"It's interesting that such a use of a power would be encouraged or even permitted by a company that, from what you've implied thus far, must be in some way linked to the American government," Nezu says, raising a paw to rub his chin. "Here, that would be considered an ethical issue." Izuku

can't help but cast a glance at Shinsou, then. *It's almost mind control*, Izuku finds himself thinking.

"Well," Rivera says, sighing. "Something being illegal doesn't actually prevent people from doing it." He reaches up, runs a hand through his hair. "When they were about thirteen they started actually participating in the clean-up itself. Then the fighting, when the two spilled into each other." Rivera gets a distant look to his eye. "They worked better like that. Maiko was the better fighter. She scared villains, intimidated them without need to hurt them, so they surrendered without hurting civilians. Hotaru was good at rescue. They made a perfect pair.

"Until twelve years ago," Rivera says. His voice is tight. Izuku expects him to continue, but he doesn't. He stares down at the table. Izuku can see his hands shaking. It's strange. Even after hearing all of this, hearing that Rivera was experimented on, too, that he joined the company largely for no good reason at all, that he hadn't really *meant* to be complicit in Sasaki's creation, it doesn't click in Izuku's mind that the Rivera in front of him is the same Rivera in the story he's telling. Except for when he sees his hands shaking. Izuku wonders if it's a bad thing that he doesn't feel sorry for him, even then.

"What happened twelve years ago?" Inko's the one to ask, because it doesn't seem like Rivera is going to continue on his own. Rivera draws a shaky breath, then looks up, directly at Izuku.

"Twelve years ago, I killed Hotaru Sasaki," Rivera says.

Chapter End Notes

content warning: child abuse, human experimentation

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anyway i hope this doesn't totally suck LMAO enjoy the cliffhanger moment i am actually still heavily debating how to write the next part so um yeah this WAS going to be longer but i didn't want to make yall wait like another week

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